



The 20 Most Important Rule Changes - 2020

1. SEARCH TIME (Rule 18)

Previously, 5 minutes were available for finding a lost ball. Now, the maximum search time is only 3 minutes. Most balls were previously found within 3 minutes and searching during the last 2 minutes was often unsuccessful. It is therefore not expected that this rule change will have a negative impact on scores.

2. BALL MOVED DURING SEARCH (Rule 7)

Previously, the player usually incurred a penalty stroke if she moved her ball during a search. Now a mishap such as this is without penalty. You can therefore use your feet and your clubs when searching in thick grass without any consequences.

3. EMBEDDED BALL (Rule 16)

Previously, a penalty stroke was incurred if the player hit herself or her own equipment. Now, this is without penalty provided it happened accidentally. You are therefore not allowed to use your equipment or your foot as a ball stopper.

4. CLUB LENGTH (Definition)

Previously the player could use any of her clubs to measure out a club-length. Now, a club-length is defined as the longest club in your bag, except for the putter. Using extra-long, "broom handle" putters for measuring is thus no longer allowed.

5. DROPPING (Rule 14)

Previously, the ball had to be dropped from shoulder height. Now, you have to drop from knee height. If you drop from shoulder height out of habit, don't worry; just pick the ball up and drop it again correctly. without penalty.

6. WRONG GREEN (Rule 13)

If the ball lands on the wrong green, playing it from there is not allowed, as this would most likely damage the green. However, if the ball only lands near the wrong green, the player was previously permitted to stand on the wrong green to play his ball. Now, you also have to take a free drop if you would have to take your stance on the wrong green. The spot for dropping is therefore now usually a bit further away from the green.

7. BALL HITS THE PLAYER OR EQUIPMENT (RULE 11)

Previously, the player only got relief if the ball had become embedded in a closely-mown area, Now, you can take a free drop from all embedded balls in the "general area", including in the semi-rough and rough. Balls embedded in a bunker or in penalty areas still have to be played as they lie.

8. DOUBLE HIT (Rule 10)

Previously, a penalty stroke was incurred if the club got stuck when a stroke was played and, as a result, the ball was hit more than once. Now, a mishap such as this is without penalty. A double hit therefore just counts as one stroke.

9. TOUCHING THE SAND IN THE BUNKER (Rule 12)

Previously, touching the sand in the bunker before the stroke was not permitted, except for very few exceptions. Now touching the sand incidentally is basically allowed, i.e. you are permitted to lean on your club. However, you are still not allowed to test the condition of the sand before the stroke is played, improve the line of play, ground the club in front of or behind the ball or touch the sand during practice swings. You therefore now do not have to be extra careful in bunkers, especially if you are not very close to the ball.

10. LOOSE IMPEDIMENTS (Rule 15)

Previously, touching leaves, twigs, stones, branches and other loose impediments in bunkers and water hazards was not

allowed. Now, you can remove them anywhere without penalty, including in bunkers and penalty areas (new name for water hazards). Please bear in mind that the ball is still not allowed to move when removing loose impediments.

11. UNPLAYABLE BALL IN TTH BUNKER (Rule 19)

Previously, the player had three dropping options -- each incurring one penalty' stroke -- if she declared her ball in a bunker unplayable. Now a fourth option is available. You can also drop the ball directly behind the bunker. However, this option costs two penalty strokes instead of just one. You can use this to avoid playing a bunker shot at all, but in most cases it will not be worth it.

12. PENALTY AREAS (Definition)

Previously, water hazards could only be marked as such if they actually contained water. Now, water hazards are called penalty areas and no longer have to contain water. This means that golf clubs are free to mark other parts of the course as penalty areas to enable sideways drops and thus speed up the game.

13. TOUCHING THE GROUND AND WATER IN PENALTY AREAS (Rule 17)

If you decide to play a ball from a water hazard as it lies, you were previously not allowed to ground the club in or out of the water when you play the ball out of a penalty area. Experience has shown that it usually doesn't make sense to try and hit a ball out of the water if it is completely covered by water.

14. BALL MOVES ON THE GREEN AFTER BEING MARKED AND PUT BACK (Rule 13)

Previously the ball had to be played from the new spot if it moved either by itself or due to the sand after being marked and put back. Now, you have to put the ball back. Most players already used to put the ball back out of reflex -- even though this was incorrect. The new rule is thus in line with natural instinct.

15. BALL ON THE GREEN MOVED ACCIDENTALLY BY THE PLAYER (Rule 13)

Previously accidentally moving the ball on the green was only without penalty with certain exceptions. Now, a mishap such as this is without penalty in all cases. If, for example, your club slips out of your hand or you make a practice swing too close to the ball and your ball moves as a result, just put the ball back without penalty.

16. REPAIRING DAMAGE ON THE GREEN (Rule 13)

Previously, repairing the line of putt was not allowed, apart from a few exceptions such as pitch marks and old hole plugs. Now you are permitted to repair nearly all damage on the green, including spike marks. But this is not free license to smooth out the entire line of putt, as natural imperfections are part of the game.

17. NO POSITIONING THE CLUB TO HELP LINE UP THE SHOT (Rule 10)

Previously, laying the putter down on the green to line up your putt was permitted. Now, you are no longer allowed to position your club to help you line up your stance. The same applies to other objects that could help you to line up.

18. NO HELP FROM THE CADDIE TO LINE UP THE SHOT (Rule 10)

Previously, the player was allowed to get help from her caddie to line up the putt. Now, the caddie is no longer permitted to stand behind the player and help her to line up. This rule change mainly affects professionals and is of little interest to the average club golfer.

19. HITTING THE FLAGSTICK (Rule 13)

Previously the flag had to be tended or removed as the ball was not allowed to hit it when putted. Now, hitting the flagstick is without penalty, which means you can always leave the flag in the hole. Statistically speaking, it is better to always leave the flag in the hole, as the flagstick helps to hole out.

20. BALL WEDGED ON THE FLAGSTICK (Rule 13)

Previously the flag had to be removed in this case to let the ball fall into the hole. Now the ball is classed as having been holed if part of the ball is below the lip. A ball wedged on the flagstick is therefore virtually always classed as holed.