

# Rule Tip of the Week seriously?

One of the interesting improvements to the Rules of Golf for 2019 is the reformulation and elevation of player misconduct from a “serious breach of etiquette” in old Rule 33-7 [Disqualification Penalty; Committee Discretion] to a more well-defined “serious misconduct” in Rule 1.2a [Conduct Expected of All Players] which reads as follows:



All players are expected to play in the spirit of the game by:

- Acting with integrity – for example, by following the Rules, applying all penalties, and being honest in all aspects of play.
- Showing consideration for others – for example, by playing at a prompt pace, looking out for the safety of others, and not distracting the play of another player.
- Taking good care of the course – for example, by replacing divots, smoothing bunkers, repairing ball-marks, and not causing unnecessary damage to the course.

There is no penalty under the Rules for failing to act in this way, **except** that the Committee may disqualify a player for acting contrary to the spirit of the game if it finds that the player has committed **serious misconduct**. [Emphasis added]

Penalties other than disqualification may be imposed for player misconduct only if those penalties are adopted as part of a Code of Conduct under Rule 1.2b.

According to Interpretation 1.2a/1 [Meaning of Serious Misconduct], “The phrase “serious misconduct” is intended to cover player misconduct that is so far removed from the expected norm in golf that the most severe sanction of removing a player from the competition is justified. This includes dishonesty, deliberately interfering with another player’s rights, or endangering the safety of others.” Interpretation 1.2a/1 sets forth the following examples of actions that are likely to be considered serious misconduct:

- Deliberately causing serious damage to a putting green.
- Disagreeing with the course setup and taking it on himself or herself to move tee-markers or boundary stakes.
- Throwing a club towards another player or spectator.
- Deliberately distracting other players while they are making strokes.
- Removing loose impediments or movable obstructions to disadvantage another player after that other player has asked him or her to leave them in place.
- Repeatedly refusing to lift a ball at rest when it interferes with another player in stroke play.
- Deliberately playing away from the hole and then towards the hole to assist the player’s partner (such as helping the player’s partner learn the break on the putting green).
- Deliberately not playing in accordance with the Rules and potentially gaining a significant advantage by doing so, despite incurring a penalty for a breach of the relevant Rule.
- Repeatedly using vulgar or offensive language.
- Using a handicap that has been established for the purpose of providing an unfair advantage or using the round being played to establish such a handicap.

In addition to Interpretation 1.2a/1, several other Interpretations offer examples of serious misconduct:

- Interpretation 3.2d(3)/1 [Deliberately Giving Incorrect Match Score or Failing to Correct Opponent’s Misunderstanding of Match Score May Result in Disqualification]
- Interpretation 3.3b(1)/1 [Marker Should Be Disqualified if He or She Knowingly Certifies a Wrong Score for Another Player]
- Interpretation 6.2b(4)/1 [Tee-Marker Moved by Player Should Be Replaced] indicates that hitting a tee-marker in anger, moving a tee-marker because the player thinks it should be in a different position, or deliberately destroying a tee-marker can all be considered serious misconduct contrary to the spirit of the game.
- Interpretation 14.4/2 [Test Drops Are Not Allowed].
- Interpretation 18.3c(2)/2 [Player May Ask Others Not to Search for His or Her Original Ball] points out that refusal to make a reasonable effort to identify a found ball may be considered serious misconduct contrary to the spirit of the game.

Finally, Rule 20.1c(2) [Players Should Protect Other Players in the Competition] advises that, in stroke play, a player may be disqualified for serious misconduct if the player fails to promptly inform another player if he or she knows or believes that the other player has breached a Rule.