

Explanation for Each Major Proposed Change in the New Rules of Golf for 2019

Each of these papers explains one or more of the major changes that are described in “Summary Chart: *The Major Proposed Changes in the New Rules of Golf for 2019.*” Each individual paper describes:

- The current Rule,
- The proposed Rule change and
- The reasons for the proposed change.

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Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

1. Ball in Motion Accidentally Deflected

Current Rule: If a player's ball in motion is accidentally deflected, the outcome depends on what caused the deflection:

- If the ball hits the player or his or her equipment or caddie, the player gets a one-stroke penalty and the ball is played as it lies (with limited exceptions).
- If the ball hits an opponent or his or her equipment or caddie, there is no penalty but the player has a choice to play the ball as it lies or to cancel the stroke and play again.
- If the ball is deflected by any other person, animal or object, there is no penalty and the ball is played as it lies.

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 11.1, for all accidental deflections, including when the ball hits the player or opponent or their equipment or caddies:

- There would be no penalty and the ball would be played as it lies (with limited exceptions).
- To address any concern that a player might deliberately position equipment to act as a backstop and potentially deflect his or her ball, there would be a penalty if the ball hits equipment that was positioned for that purpose (new Rule 11.2a).

Reasons for Change:

- Many objects, persons and animals are present on a golf course during play; it is inevitable that a ball in motion will sometimes hit them before coming to rest, and a player is generally required to accept the outcome (whether good or bad).
- Just as there is no penalty in stroke play if one player (or his or her equipment or caddie) accidentally deflects another player's ball, there is no need for a penalty when a player (or the player's equipment or caddie) accidentally deflects his or her own ball.
 - Accidental deflections are, by definition, an accident – and this applies equally to players, caddies and equipment, which are necessarily close to the area of play.
 - When a player's ball hits the player or his or her equipment, it is usually the result of a poorly played shot or an unanticipated outcome, such as when a ball bounces off a bunker wall or a tree and hits the player, or when a chip shot rolls over a green and hits the player's cart or golf bag.
 - The outcome in such cases is random and unpredictable, and it results in a disadvantage for the player at least as often as it results in an advantage.
- For the same reasons, there is no need to give the player the option to cancel and replay a stroke when an opponent in match play accidentally deflects the player's ball.
- Treating all accidental deflections the same, no matter who or what caused them, would greatly simplify the Rules in various situations, such as when a player's ball is deflected by equipment being shared with another player (such as a golf cart); it would no longer be necessary to apply complicated analysis to decide which player the shared equipment belonged to at that time.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

2. Ball Moved During Search

Current Rule: If a player moves his or her ball while searching for it:

- The player generally gets a one-stroke penalty (there are four limited exceptions), and
- When the player does not know the ball's exact original spot, he or she must return it to play by dropping it as near as possible to that estimated spot.

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 7.4, if a player accidentally moves his or her ball while searching for it:

- The player would get no penalty for causing it to move, and
- The ball would always be replaced; if the exact spot is not known, the player would replace the ball on the estimated original spot (including on, under or against any attached natural objects which the ball had been at rest under or against).

Reasons for Change:

- A fundamental principle of golf is to play the ball as it lies; so the Rules should help the player to find his or her ball and play it from the spot where it was at rest.
- Players often need to probe in grass, bushes, leaves and other conditions to look for a hidden ball, and such reasonable acts create an inherent risk of moving the ball.
- The current Rules allow both an opponent in match play, and other players in stroke play, to help search for the player's ball without risk of penalty if they accidentally move the player's ball; outside persons such as spectators are allowed to help search as well.
- It is inconsistent to encourage everyone but the player or his or her caddie (or partner) to look for the ball, and this creates an odd incentive for the player to hold back and let others search.
- Because the ball's location isn't known before it is found, eliminating a penalty in this situation would be a reasonable exception to the obligation to avoid moving a ball at rest.
- Removing this penalty would not allow the player to benefit from excessive actions in searching for the ball, as there would be a penalty if the player searched in an unreasonable way (that is, beyond what was necessary for a "fair search") that improved the conditions affecting the next stroke (see new Rules 7.1 and 8.1).
- Changing the procedure for replacing a ball moved in search would help make sure the ball is played from its original spot or, if that spot is not known, on the estimated spot, including from a poor lie under grass or other growing things:
 - Today, when a player returns such a ball to play by dropping it as near as possible to its estimated spot, the ball is typically dropped on top of the grass or other growing things, which can result in a much better lie than the player originally had.
 - Under the new procedure, the player would need to replace that ball on its estimated spot on, under or against the grass or other growing things, and so face the challenge of playing from that difficult spot where the ball had come to rest.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

3. Ball Played from Green Hits Unattended Flagstick in Hole

Current Rule: Under Rule 17-3, if a player makes a stroke on the putting green and the ball then hits the unattended flagstick that was left in the hole, the player gets the general penalty.

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 13.2b(3):

- There would no longer be a penalty if a ball played from the putting green hits an unattended flagstick in the hole.
- Players would not be required to putt with the unattended flagstick in the hole; rather, they would continue to have the choice to remove the flagstick before playing or to have it attended.

Reasons for Change:

- Allowing a player to putt with the flagstick in the hole without fear of penalty should generally help speed up play:
 - For example, if a putt is long enough that the player cannot easily see the hole unless the flagstick is left in, the player currently needs to wait for another person to attend the flagstick even if it is the player's turn to play or (in stroke play) if the player is ready to play and it would save time to go ahead and do so.
 - This change could also speed up play for short tap-ins, as the player could simply putt the ball into the hole without first removing and then replacing the flagstick.
- When the players do not have caddies, the current Rule can result in considerable delay, such as:
 - When the opponent (or the other player in stroke play) is raking a greenside bunker and will be delayed for a minute or two before coming on to the green.
 - When other players in stroke play are delayed in coming on to the green for other reasons, such as a ball search, indecision about what club to use or shot to play, etc.
 - When all players in the group have long putts and so will need to walk back and forth to the hole to attend the flagstick for one another (which sometimes produces uncertainty about who will or should attend for someone else).
- In match play, a player without a caddie would now be able to choose to putt with the unattended flagstick in the hole rather than ask the opponent to attend the flagstick, reducing the potential for dispute that can arise when the opponent attends for the player (such as when the opponent fails to remove the flagstick and the ball hits it).
- On balance it is expected that there should be no advantage in being able to putt with the unattended flagstick in the hole:
 - In some cases the ball may strike the flagstick and bounce out of the hole when it might otherwise have been holed, and
 - In other cases the ball may hit the flagstick and finish in the hole when it might otherwise have missed.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

4. Caddie Lifting Ball on the Putting Green

Current Rule: A player's caddie has no general authority to mark, lift and replace the player's ball on the putting green:

- A caddie is treated the same as any other person for these purposes: the caddie may mark and lift the ball only if authorised by the player, and the caddie may replace the ball only if he or she was the one who had lifted or moved it; and
- This authorisation must be given each time the player wants the caddie to lift the ball.

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 14.1:

- The player's caddie would be allowed to mark and lift the player's ball on the putting green any time the player is allowed to do so, without needing authorisation.
- The caddie would continue to be allowed to replace the player's ball only if the caddie was the one who had lifted or moved the ball.

Reasons for Change:

- There is no compelling reason to prohibit a caddie from performing these purely mechanical acts when the player's ball is on the putting green:
 - A player is already free to mark, lift, clean and replace a ball on the putting green at any time (except when another ball is in motion), and thus this happens routinely.
 - The elimination of the penalty for a player who accidentally causes his or her ball to move on the putting green would eliminate any risk that allowing a caddie to mark, lift and replace the ball would result in unforeseen consequences to the player.
- In many places, it is common practice for caddies to mark, lift, clean and replace the player's ball when it first comes to rest on the putting green without authorisation from the player, even though this is not permitted under the current Rules.
 - In some areas of the world, this is a cultural expectation relating the role of a caddie.
 - In other places, this is done to help with pace of play - for example, where a caddie is shared by two players, the caddie may mark, lift, clean and replace one player's ball (so that he or she can be ready to play) before going to help the other player.
- This change would also benefit players who have physical limitations that make it difficult to bend down to mark and lift the ball, without needing to give the caddie specific permission each and every time.
- Giving the caddie this authority is consistent with the limited role of a caddie:
 - Any player who prefers not to have the caddie mark and lift the ball would simply be able to tell the caddie not to do so.
 - A caddie would still be prohibited from making strategic choices for the player, such as deciding to take relief under a Rule, deciding where to drop a ball, etc.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

5. Caddie Standing Behind a Player to Help Line the Player Up

Current Rule: Under Rule 14-2b:

- When a player is taking a stance, the player's caddie is allowed to stand behind to help the player line up to the target and confirm that the player is correctly aligned.
- The caddie must then move away before the player makes the stroke; otherwise the player is penalised if the caddie is positioned on or close to an extension of the line of play behind the ball when the stroke is made.

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 10.2b(3):

- The current prohibition would be extended so that, once the player begins taking a stance for the stroke, and until the stroke is made, the player's caddie must not deliberately stand on or close to an extension of the line of play behind the ball.
- There would be no penalty if the caddie accidentally stands on or close to an extension of the line of play behind the ball, rather than in trying to help in lining up.

Reasons for Change:

- Although a player may get advice from a caddie on the shot to be played, the line of play and similar matters, the ability to line up one's feet and body accurately to a target line is a fundamental skill of the game for which the player alone should be responsible.
 - Allowing a caddie to stand behind a player taking a stance so as to direct the player how to line up undermines the player's need to use his or her own alignment skills and judgment.
- This practice has been controversial for other reasons:
 - Many players and others consider it to be distracting.
 - It may delay play, such as when players wait for the caddie to confirm they are correctly aligned as part of their set-up routine.
- We believe that an appropriate line is drawn between allowing advice from a caddie and prohibiting the caddie from being involved in directing the player in the act of taking a stance to play the ball.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

6. Code of Player Conduct

Current Rule: A Committee may penalise a player for improper conduct (such as dishonesty, offensive remarks, damaging equipment or the course, etc.) only in one way:

- If the player is guilty of a “serious breach of etiquette”, the Committee may disqualify the player from the competition under Rule 33-7.
- But unless some other specific Rule is breached, the Committee has no authority to impose any lesser penalty for a player’s misconduct.

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 1.2b, a Committee would be allowed to adopt a “Code of Conduct” that:

- Sets the Committee’s own standards for how players should conduct themselves, and
- May set penalties less than disqualification (such as a one-stroke penalty or a two-stroke penalty/loss of hole penalty) for a player’s breach of those standards.

The Committee would also still be able to disqualify a player for serious misconduct that is contrary to the spirit of the game, as emphasised in new Rule 1.2a (see Explanation for Proposed Rule Change – *Expected Standards of Player Conduct*).

Reasons for Change:

- Some Committees have requested additional means under the Rules to allow them to address player conduct that is contrary to expected standards that are central to the game (such as courtesy and sportsmanship).
 - In many cases, disqualifying a player for inappropriate behavior would be overly harsh - leaving Committees today with no way to penalise players for such behavior.
 - Some Committees deal with this through disciplinary sanctions outside the Rules (such as warnings, fines, restriction of playing privileges, etc.), but such methods are not always effective, appropriate or practical.
 - Also, as the game’s global reach has continued to expand to include golfers from many more cultures and backgrounds, there is a growing desire to let Committees set and enforce standards that fit their particular needs and local norms of proper behavior.
 - This has been a particular concern for junior golf organisations whose mission often includes teaching young golfers how to act while on the course.
- The proposed Rule change would give Committees flexibility to set and enforce standards of conduct specific to their competitions and players, should they choose to do so.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

7. Concept of “Penalty Areas” to Supersede “Water Hazards”

Current Rule: Rule 26-1 allows relief with penalty when a ball is in a “water hazard” (marked yellow) or a “lateral water hazard” (marked red).

- These hazards are limited to areas with water or where water may flow; no other areas may be marked as water hazards, even if they might present similar obstacles to play.
- Water hazards are intended as the norm; lateral water hazards are to be used only when it is impracticable to drop a ball behind a water hazard under Rule 26-1b.

Proposed Rule: Under the new Rules, “Water hazards” would be superseded by the expanded concept of “penalty areas”, and new Rule 17 will provide the same basic options for relief that exist under the current Rules:

- A penalty area would include both (1) all areas currently defined in the Rules as a water hazard or lateral water hazard and (2) any other areas the Committee chooses to define as penalty areas (with recommended guidelines to be provided in the Handbook).
- Penalty areas may therefore include areas such as deserts, jungles, lava rock fields, etc.
- The two types of penalty areas would be known by the colour of their marking: red penalty areas (today called lateral water hazards) and yellow penalty areas (today called water hazards); and Committees would be given the discretion to mark all penalty areas as red so that lateral relief would always be allowed.
- The term “hazard” would no longer be used in the Rules.

Reasons for Change:

- The options to take relief back on a line behind any water hazard (Rule 26-1b) or within two club-lengths of where a ball entered a lateral water hazard have become important for pace of play, as the player can usually play from near the hazard rather than having to go back some distance to play from where the previous stroke was made.
- It has been recognised that requiring areas to contain water seems to be a somewhat arbitrary reason for permitting such relief options.
- For reasons such as safety and pace of play, many Committees have sought to expand the use of lateral water hazards by marking areas that do not contain water and by marking water hazards as red where that is not specifically contemplated by the Rules.
- The broader use of “penalty areas” would allow Committees to respond to the wide range of settings in which golf is played by giving relief from areas that present similar obstacles to existing water hazards such as difficulties with finding and playing a ball and similar practical needs about pace of play.
- Giving Committees the discretion to mark all penalty areas as red would make it simpler for players to learn the relief options (as the distinction between yellow and red water hazards is not always well understood) and would further help pace of play.
- Individual Committees would remain free to choose what to mark as a penalty area (and so for example could decide only to mark traditional water hazards) and when to mark a penalty area as yellow (such as to preserve the challenge of playing a particular hole).

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

8. Elimination of Opposite Side Relief for Red Penalty Areas

Current Rule: Rule 26-1c provides two extra options for taking relief from a lateral (red) water hazard; the player may drop a ball within two club-lengths of (and not nearer the hole than):

- The point where the original ball last crossed the margin of the lateral water hazard, or
- A point on the opposite margin of the hazard equidistant from the hole (Rule 26-1c(ii)).

Proposed Rule: New Rule 17.1c would remove the option to take relief on the opposite side of a red penalty area (the new term that would include what is today called a lateral water hazard):

- This means that, when a ball is in a red penalty area, the player would have three options for relief (all for a one-stroke penalty) rather than four options as today.
- But a Committee could still adopt a Local Rule allowing opposite side relief on those holes where it believes the other relief options are not viable.

Reasons for Change:

- Opposite side relief is a complicated option that many players are not familiar with and that is seldom used.
- The primary purpose behind this relief was to give an extra relief option for the unusual cases where neither back-on-a-line relief (Rule 26-1b) nor lateral relief on the side where the ball entered the water hazard (Rule 26-1c(i)) seem viable and the player's only realistic option is to take relief under penalty of stroke and distance (Rule 26-1a).
- In practice, opposite side relief is often taken when a player actually has adequate relief under one or both of the other relief options and thus serves only to give an unnecessary extra option that at times can seem too advantageous.
 - For example, where a stream runs next to a fairway and a line of trees or thicker rough is on the other side, a ball that is poorly played into the trees or rough and then bounces back into the water can result in the player being allowed to take relief on the fairway.
 - For larger bodies of water such as a pond or small lake, opposite side relief can allow the player to play from a considerable distance away from where the ball entered the water or came to rest and/or to play from the fairway of another hole.
 - Removing this option may, in rare situations, result in a player's best (or only) option being stroke-and-distance relief; there is nothing wrong with a player sometimes having to do so.
- Assessing the relief option for opposite side relief can take considerable time and so eliminating this option should benefit pace of play.
- This change would also help avoid any concern that, with the expanded use of red penalty areas, a player might be able to use the opposite side option to drop on the green side of the penalty area, thereby avoiding the challenge of having to play over the penalty area.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

9. Elimination of the Requirement to Announce the Player's Intent to Lift a Ball

Current Rule: A special procedure applies when a player intends to mark and lift a ball in three specific situations under the Rules:

- Before lifting the ball, the player must announce the intention to do so to the opponent in match play or another player or the marker in stroke play, and then allow that person to observe the process of lifting and replacing the ball.
- This procedure applies when a ball will be lifted (1) for identification (Rule 12-2), (2) to see if it has become unfit for play (Rule 5-3), or (3) to see if it lies in a condition from which relief is allowed, such as when the ball might be embedded (Decision 20-1/0.7).

Proposed Rule: In all three situations under the new Rules (that is, Rule 4.2b, Rule 7.3 and Rule 16.4):

- A player would be allowed to mark and lift the ball and proceed under the Rule without needing first to announce this intention to another person or to give that person a chance to observe the process.
- But the player would still get a one-stroke penalty if he or she marked and lifted the ball without good reason to do so under that Rule.

Reasons for Change:

- The Rules generally rely on the integrity of the player.
 - In other relief situations, including when a ball may be lifted and played from a different place, players are allowed to proceed under the Rules without being required to involve another person in any part of the process.
 - For example, a player may determine that a cart path interferes with the lie of his or her ball or the area of intended stance or swing, find the nearest point of relief, lift the ball and drop it in the specified area, determine that the ball has come to rest in the right place, and play the ball – all without having to announce his or her intentions to another person or to allow that other person to observe the process to make sure the player acts correctly.
- Eliminating the announcement requirements for these three situations would simplify the Rules, bring consistency to the approach of trusting the player and eliminate an unnecessary procedural penalty for simply not informing an appropriate person.
- These procedural requirements often have no practical effect as many players to whom such an announcement is made decline to observe the lifting and replacement process and thus are content to rely on the player's integrity.
- This change should also speed up play because a player would no longer need to take the time to inform another player of the intent to lift and to wait to see if that other player wants to come over to observe the lifting and replacement of the ball.
- The requirement for the player to have a good reason to lift under the Rule is a sufficient safeguard against inappropriate lifting or abuse of the Rule.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

10. Encouraging Prompt Pace of Play

Current Rule: Although intended to support pace of play, the Rules do not affirmatively emphasise this issue or encourage players to play promptly:

- Rule 6-7 provides only that “undue delay” is prohibited and that players must follow any pace of play guidelines if established by the Committee to prevent “slow play”.
- Although players are allowed to play out of turn to save time, this is neither highlighted nor particularly made clear in the text of the Rules.

Proposed Rule: New Rule 5.6 would encourage prompt pace of play by recommending that:

- Players should recognise that their pace of play affects others and they should play promptly throughout the round (such as by preparing in advance for each stroke and moving promptly between strokes and in going to the next tee),
- A player should make a stroke in no more than 40 seconds (and usually in less time) after the player is able to play without interference or distraction, and
- Committees should adopt a Pace of Play Policy (rather than only say they may do so).

In addition, new Rule 6.4 would expressly allow playing out of turn in match play by agreement, and for stroke play, would affirmatively allow and encourage players to play out of turn in a safe and responsible way to save time or for convenience (also known as “ready golf”).

Reasons for Change:

- By giving players affirmative guidance, support and encouragement on prompt play, these proposed Rule changes would help in:
 - Setting expectations for both beginners and experienced players on what types of behavior are considered prompt play, including the maximum amount of time it should normally take to make a stroke, and
 - Encouraging players to play faster by confirming that it is proper to play out of turn in stroke play when it is safe and responsible to do so (that is, to play “ready golf”).
- Enforcing pace of play would continue to be primarily up to each Committee, as there are limits to what the Rules themselves can do to insist that players play promptly.
- For example, it is impractical for the Rules to impose penalties whenever a player does not complete a round or a hole or make a stroke in a time fixed in the Rules:
 - Golf is played in so many different settings and by so many different people that any such time limits may naturally differ for any given competition or course.
 - There is also no practical way to require all players to follow (and to enforce against one another) any form of “shot clock” for each stroke made during a round.
- These changes would enable Committees to point to specific expectations set by the Rules when using their authority to enforce prompt play, and encourage every Committee to adopt a pace of play policy so that all players on the course, whatever the type or level of play, would know what is expected of them.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

11. Expected Standards of Player Conduct

Current Rule: The Rules address player conduct in only a limited and muted way:

- They set out no standards of conduct, except indirectly when giving the Committee discretion to disqualify players for a “serious breach of etiquette” (Rule 33-7).
- The Rules do not explain what “breach of etiquette” means, leaving that to Decision 33-7/8 and a few other Decisions.
- Although a separate Etiquette Section is published in the same book along with the Rules, it is not made part of the Rules (other than through a few Decisions).

Proposed Rule: New Rule 1.2a would consolidate the expected standards of player conduct:

- It would declare that players are expected to play in the spirit of the game by acting with integrity, showing consideration to others and taking good care of the course.
- It would unequivocally state the Committee’s authority to disqualify a player for any serious misconduct that is contrary to the spirit of the game.
- In place of the unclear concept of “breach of etiquette”, it would use the more direct and stronger phrases “misconduct” and “serious misconduct”.

Rule 1.2b would also give the Committee authority to adopt its own Code of Conduct and to set penalties for its breach (see Explanation for Proposed Rule Change— *Code of Player Conduct*).

Reasons for Change:

- Golf is a sport in which high standards of conduct are expected from players, and the Rules should declare this in a clear and direct way.
- Although the current Rule book has a separate Etiquette Section that covers the most important aspects of the spirit of the game:
 - The priorities and emphasis of the section are unclear, as it also includes more general recommendations on a variety of topics, and
 - The section does not have the force of Rules or naturally form part of a Committee’s powers.
- Using Rule 1.2a to explain playing in the spirit of the game would help in:
 - Giving more prominence to the expectation that all players will act with integrity, show consideration to others and take good care of the course, and
 - Setting expectations so that players are on notice that serious misconduct in failing to meet those expectations could lead to disqualification.
- Changing the term from “serious breach of etiquette” to “serious misconduct” would help to distinguish this concept from the term “serious breach” which would continue to be used in the new Rules for an entirely different purpose.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

12. Fixed Distances (not Club-lengths) Used for Measuring

Current Rule: Club-lengths are used to measure the limits of many areas under the Rules:

- One club-length defines the dropping area for free relief (such as relief from obstructions or ground under repair) and two club-lengths defines the dropping area for certain types of penalty relief (such as relief from lateral water hazards or an unplayable ball).
- Two club-lengths are also used as the limit of how far a dropped ball may roll from where it first hits the course without needing to be re-dropped (Rule 20-2c(vi)).
- The teeing ground on any hole is defined as a rectangular area two club-lengths deep.

Proposed Rule: Club-lengths would no longer be used to measure for any purpose:

- The relief area for dropping a ball would have a fixed size: 20 inches (50.8 centimetres) replaces one club-length, and 80 inches (203.2 centimetres) replaces two club-lengths.
- A re-drop would only be required when a ball comes to rest outside the relief area and therefore how many club-lengths a dropped ball rolls would no longer matter when determining if a re-drop is required.
- The teeing area of any hole would have a fixed depth of 80 inches (203.2 centimetres).

Reasons for Change:

- The smaller relief area (and not permitting any ball to roll outside that relief area) would usually mean that the player will play from closer to the ball's original spot and the nearest point of relief than where the player may play from today.
- Using a fixed distance for measuring would eliminate a number of issues, such as:
 - The inconsistency and potential unfairness of having the size of a relief area differ for each player based on the length of his or her clubs (including eliminating the advantage for players who currently can use a long putter for measuring).
 - The confusion about when a player may use two different clubs in taking relief (under current Rules, a player may use one club to find the nearest point of relief, and another club to measure, but must use only a single club for measuring the area for dropping and the distance a dropped ball has rolled).
- A player would no longer be able to make strategic choices about the size of the relief areas by choosing a shorter club or longer club for measuring.
- Using a fixed measure would be a simple process, with 20 and 40 inch (50.8 and 101.6 centimetre) markings on the shaft of clubs likely to be the primary tool used by players for measuring.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

13. "Maximum Score" Form of Stroke Play

Current Rule: The Rules now recognise two main forms of stroke play:

- The basic form of stroke play where a player must hole out at every hole, or else is disqualified (Rule 3), and
- The Stableford form of play where a point scoring system is used and a player who scores two or more than the fixed score or does not finish the hole simply gets zero points for that hole (Rule 32).

Proposed Rule: "Maximum Score" would be a new, additional form of stroke play:

- A player's score for each hole is capped at a maximum set by the Committee, which may be fixed (such as 6, 8, 10, etc.), related to par (such as two times par or triple bogey), or related to the player's handicap (such as net double bogey).
- A player who does not complete a hole (often referred to informally as "picking up") would not be disqualified, but simply gets the maximum score for the hole.

Reasons for Change:

- The need to hole out on every hole in stroke play can have at least two downsides: (1) it often leads to a slow pace of play, and (2) it may discourage golfers who feel they no longer have a realistic chance to compete or to make a good score for the round once they get a very high score on one or two holes.
- Maximum Score would be an alternative form of play that addresses both concerns, by allowing a player to "pick up" when he or she scores at or above the maximum and by capping the player's score for any hole at the maximum.
- These are important reasons why Stableford is popular in various parts of the world; Maximum Score would create a similar form of stroke play, with the difference that scoring is by strokes rather than by number of points.
- The Maximum Score form of play would be unlikely to be used for elite play, but it may be useful in many other contexts, such as for play by beginners or golfers who are less skilled or experienced and, more generally, for club level and day-to-day play when pace of play is a particular concern.
- Like Stableford, Maximum Score could be used in conjunction with handicap systems that set a maximum score (such as net double bogey) that can be posted on any hole.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

14. Moving or Touching Loose Impediments or Touching Sand in a Bunker

Current Rule: When a player's ball is in a bunker, Rule 13-4 provides (with exceptions) that the player must not:

- Test the condition of the bunker,
- Touch the ground in the bunker with a hand or club, or
- Touch or move loose impediments that are in the bunker.

Proposed Rule: Under new Rules 12.2a and 12.2b, the player would be allowed to touch or move loose impediments in a bunker and would be generally allowed to touch the sand with a hand or club; but a limited prohibition continues so that the player must not:

- Deliberately touch the sand in a bunker with a hand, club, rake or other object to test the condition of the sand to learn information for the stroke, or
- Touch the sand in a bunker with a club in making a practice swing, in grounding the club right in front of or behind the ball, or in making the backswing for a stroke.

Reasons for Change:

- The challenge of playing from a bunker is the need to play out of the sand, not to play with leaves, stones or other loose impediments left in place in the bunker.
- The current approach has created confusion by stating a total prohibition on touching the sand with a hand or club and then recognising many exceptions.
- The revised Rule would simplify this by prohibiting only those acts where there is a purpose for doing so under the Rules:
 - Deliberately testing the condition of the sand with a hand or club would continue to be prohibited because part of the player's challenge is to assess and predict how the sand may affect the stroke, and also because it would be time consuming and inappropriate for players to dig in the sand with a hand or club for that purpose before every shot.
 - Touching the sand with the club right in front of or behind the ball or in the backswing for the stroke would continue to be prohibited to make sure the player does nothing to reduce the challenge of playing from the sand; these prohibitions are already well known and followed by almost all players.
 - Touching the sand with a club in taking a practice swing would continue to be prohibited both for pace of play and to avoid having large amounts of sand deposited outside bunkers (especially greenside bunkers) as a result of repeated practice swings.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

15. No Penalty for Moving a Ball on the Putting Green

Current Rule: Under Rule 18-2, if a player (or opponent) accidentally causes the player's ball to move anywhere on the course, there is a one-stroke penalty (unless one of several exceptions applies).

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 13.1, there would no longer be a penalty if a player (or opponent) accidentally causes the player's ball to move on the putting green.

The substance of this Rule change has already been implemented as of 1 January 2017 by authorising Committees to adopt a Local Rule that eliminates the penalty for accidentally moving a ball on the putting green.

Reasons for Change:

- The shape, slope and condition of many putting greens today increase the chances that a ball at rest on the putting green might move, and it can be difficult to determine whether a player caused the ball to move or whether the ball was moved by wind or other natural causes.
- When a ball moves while the player is doing nothing more than taking normal actions to prepare for a stroke, it can seem unfair for the player to be penalised.
- Most "ball moved" situations occur on the putting green, involve minimal movement of the ball, frequently occur when the player is taking reasonable actions to prepare for a stroke and the ball can be easily replaced.
- These considerations are not the same when the ball lies off the putting green, and so the penalty would continue to apply (with exceptions, such as accidentally moving a ball during search) to a player or opponent in those circumstances to reinforce the principle that the ball should be played as it lies and that players should continue to exercise care when near to a ball in play.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

16. Procedure for Dropping and Playing a Ball from a Relief Area

Current Rule: When taking relief (with or without penalty) under many of the Rules, the player is required to use this dropping procedure:

- The player must drop the ball while standing erect and holding the ball at shoulder height and arm's length; or else it must be re-dropped (Rule 20-2a).
- The ball must first strike the course in a specified place and must not strike any person or equipment before coming to rest; or else it must be re-dropped (Rule 20-2b).
- The ball is then to be played from where it comes to rest, **except** that if it ends up in any of 9 specific locations (such as nearer to the hole or more than 2 club-lengths from where it struck the course), it must be re-dropped (Rule 20-2c).
- If the ball comes to rest in any of those 9 locations when dropped a second time, the player must place the ball where it first struck the course on the second drop.

Proposed Rule: Players would continue to drop a ball when taking relief, but the dropping procedure would be changed in several ways as detailed in Rule 14.3:

- How a ball may be dropped is simplified, with no limitations on how the ball must be held or how high it must be dropped from; the only requirement would be that the ball be let go from any height above the ground or any growing thing or other natural or artificial object so that it falls through the air, rather than being set down or placed on these things.
- The focus of the dropping procedure would be on a specific "relief area" set by the Rule under which relief is being taken and would be either 20 inches or 80 inches (50.8 or 203.2 centimetres) from a reference point or reference line (and may have certain other limitations).
- The ball would need only to be dropped in and come to rest in the relief area; and there would be no re-drop requirement if the dropped ball accidentally hits a person or object before coming to rest in the relief area.
- If the dropped ball comes to rest outside the relief area, it would be dropped again; there would be no set number of times for re-dropping, as the player would need to make all reasonable efforts to drop it in a way and place so it stays in the relief area.
- In the unusual case where the ball will not come to rest in the relief area no matter how or where dropped (such as a relief area on a steep slope with short grass), the player would then place the ball anywhere in the relief area.
- If the placed ball will not come to rest on that spot after two attempts, the player would then place the ball on the nearest spot (not nearer the hole) where it will come to rest.

Reasons for Change:

- The new procedure moves away from the current mechanical approach on how to drop a ball, with its several procedural requirements; the focus would appropriately be on where the ball is dropped and played from, not the mechanics of how it gets there.
- At the same time, requiring the player to drop a ball (as opposed to the alternative of placing it) would retain a desired randomness about where the ball will end up:

- This is especially the case when a ball is dropped in more difficult conditions such as thick rough or longer grass.
- The player has no guarantee that the ball will come to rest on a desired spot or in a good lie.
- Relaxing the restrictions on how to drop a ball would help pace of play by making it easier for a player to take relief with only a single drop:
 - When a ball is dropped from shoulder height, it often rolls a considerable distance, so that the need for a re-drop is common.
 - In contrast, when a ball is dropped from just above the ground, it will usually come to rest very close to where it hits the ground and should stay in the relief area.
- The new procedure avoids giving players more relief than necessary:
 - A dropped ball is currently allowed to roll up to 2 club-lengths from where it hits the ground – so that, for example, it can end up being played up to 3 club-lengths from the nearest point of relief from a cart path or ground under repair, or up to 4 club-lengths from where the original ball went into a lateral water hazard or where it was unplayable.
 - Requiring the dropped ball to come to rest in and be played from the same relief area where it was dropped would make it much more likely that the ball will be played from close to where it originally came to rest.
 - The new procedure would save time and prevent players from undermining the purpose of the Rule, which can occur today when players may deliberately try to drop a ball in a position where it will need to be re-dropped and then will be able to be placed after a second unsuccessful drop.
- Allowing the player to drop a ball from only a little above the ground would help avoid the unfortunate situation that commonly arises today where a ball dropped from shoulder height in a bunker ends up embedded in the sand.
- The new procedure would make it simpler for players to know where and how to drop a ball:
 - For example, many times today a player is required to drop a ball as near as possible to a certain spot (such as where the previous stroke was made or where a ball was embedded) and questions can arise about whether it was dropped near enough to that spot.
 - The new procedure when dropping with reference to a spot would be to drop a ball anywhere in a relief area measured 20 inches (50.8 centimetres) from (but not nearer the hole than) that spot.
- It would be simpler for players to know when to re-drop a ball:
 - A player currently needs to know the 9 re-dropping scenarios in Rule 20-2c; these are difficult to understand and apply and this is a widely misunderstood Rule.
 - Under the new Rule, the player would only need to know that the ball must be re-dropped if it comes to rest outside the relief area.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

17. Reasonable Judgment in Estimating and Measuring

Current Rule: When estimating or measuring a spot, point, line, area or distance under a Rule:

- The player's judgment in doing so is normally given no particular weight or deference; if the player ends up playing from a wrong place based on a wrong estimate or measurement, even if only by a small amount, the player will get a penalty.
- An exception is when a player uses his or her best judgment to estimate where a ball entered a water hazard, plays the ball and then learns that the judgment was wrong; in that case, there is no penalty if it was an honest judgment (Decision 26-1/17).

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 1.3a(2), whenever required to estimate or measure a spot, point, line, area or distance, the player's reasonable judgment would be accepted if:

- The player did all that could be reasonably expected under the circumstances to make a prompt and accurate estimation or measurement.
- This means that the player's reasonable judgment would be upheld even if later shown to be wrong by other information (such as video technology).

Reasons for Change:

- The Rules generally rely on the integrity of the player, and this is a natural and appropriate extension of this trust in the player.
- There are many times when the Rules require a player to estimate or measure a spot, point, line, area or distance, such as when the player:
 - Uses a ball-marker to mark a ball's spot, and then replace the ball, or
 - Estimates the spot where the previous stroke was made, when playing again under penalty of stroke and distance or when a stroke has been cancelled, or
 - Needs to find a reference point or reference line for taking relief (such as the nearest point of complete relief or the line from the hole through the spot of an unplayable ball), or to determine the extent of a relief area (such as measuring a fixed distance from a reference point or reference line).
- Such judgments need to be made promptly, and players often cannot be precise in doing so.
- So long as the player did all that could be reasonably expected under the circumstances:
 - The player gets no penalty for any small inaccuracies, irrespective of any advantage gained.
 - There would be no penalty in certain situations where the player's estimation was significantly wrong but there was effectively no way to have done a better job (as may happen when estimating where a ball entered a water hazard or where a ball was at rest before being moved by an outside influence).
- Accepting a player's reasonable judgment would limit "second-guessing" that can arise from the use of enhanced technology (such as video review when golf is televised).

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

18. Relief for an Embedded Ball

Current Rule: In certain circumstances, a player is allowed to take relief when his or her ball is embedded in its own pitch-mark:

- Rule 25-2 allows relief only when a ball is embedded in a closely-mown area (that is, an area cut to fairway height or less) that is through the green.
- But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule that extends this relief to a ball embedded anywhere through the green, whether or not in a closely-mown area (except when embedded in sand).
- In taking relief, the player must drop the original ball as near as possible to where it was embedded and not nearer the hole.

Proposed Rule: The current default position in the Rules will be reversed:

- New Rule 16.3 would allow relief for a ball embedded anywhere in the “general area” (that is, the area currently known as “through the green”), except when embedded in sand.
- But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule restricting relief to a ball embedded in those parts of the general area cut to fairway height or less.
- In taking relief, the player would drop the original ball or a substituted ball within 20 inches (50.8 centimetres) from (but not nearer the hole than) the point right behind the spot where the ball was embedded.

Reasons for Change:

- This is an appropriate exception to the principle of playing the ball as it lies because having to play a ball that is stuck in soft or wet ground (whether in the fairway or the rough) should not be considered part of the normal challenge of playing a course.
- Allowing relief throughout the general area is consistent with other relief Rules, which do not make distinctions based on the height of the grass in the general area.
- Many Committees throughout the world, from the professional and elite amateur levels to the typical club level, have adopted the current Local Rule.
- In many countries the Local Rule is sufficiently well established that golfers assume that the Rules always allow relief anywhere in the general area.
- Reversing the default position would help avoid the confusion that sometimes exists today when clubs or players do not realise that such relief is not allowed unless a Local Rule has been adopted.
- Basing the relief area on the reference point “right behind” the spot of the embedded ball would avoid the question of what to do when a dropped ball comes to rest in the same pitch-mark where it had been embedded; such a ball would always be re-dropped because it came to rest outside the relief area.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

19. Repairing Damage on Putting Green

Current Rule: Rule 16-1c allows only limited repair of damage on the putting green:

- A player may repair any old hole plug or ball-mark on the green on his or her line of play, whether the ball is on or off the putting green (this is an exception to Rule 13-2).
- But a player must not repair any other damage on the green (such as spike marks, animal damage, etc.) if it might assist in his or her subsequent play of the hole.

Proposed Rule: New Rule 13.1b(1) allows repair of almost any damage on the green:

- “Damage on the putting green” would be defined to include all types of damage (such as spike marks, shoe damage, indentations from a club or flagstick, animal damage, etc.), **except** aeration holes, natural imperfections/defects of the ground surface or natural wear of the hole.
- The player is allowed to repair damage only with his or her hands or feet or normal equipment such as a tee, club or ball-mark repair tool and must not unreasonably delay play.

Reasons for Change:

- Because putting greens are specially prepared for playing the ball along the ground, the Rules allow the player to do things on the green that are not allowed anywhere else:
 - The player may mark, lift and clean a ball on the green at any time, remove sand and loose soil on the green and repair old hole plugs and ball-marks on the green.
 - Given this philosophy of allowing players to try to have a smooth surface for rolling the ball, there is no conceptual reason for prohibiting repair of other types of damage (whether made by players, animals, maintenance staff, etc.).
- This Rule change would eliminate the frequent questions among players and referees about whether a particular area of damage on the green is a ball-mark that may be repaired or is a spike mark or other damage that must not be repaired.
- This change would also reduce the current tension between prohibiting a player from repairing damage while playing a hole and then encouraging the player to repair that damage (such as repairing the ragged edge of the hole or tapping down spike marks) as a courtesy to following groups or in care of the course (Decisions 1-2/0.7 and 1-2/3.5).
- The concern has been noted that allowing repair of all damage on the putting green could slow down play if players try to repair too many areas; but we believe this is unlikely to be true for most players and that the Rule against unreasonable delay (as well as a Committee’s pace of play policy) can be used to address situations where a player seeks to make excessive repairs.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

20. Replacing Ball When Original Spot Not Known

Current Rule: If a player's ball at rest anywhere off the putting green is lifted or moved under a Rule that requires the ball to be replaced:

- The ball must be replaced by placing it on its original spot (Rule 20-3a).
- But if the ball's exact original spot is not known, the player must get the ball back into play not by placing it but by dropping it as near as possible to the ball's estimated original spot (Rule 20-3c).

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 14.2c, in that same situation:

- The ball would always be placed on a spot rather than being dropped.
- If the exact original spot is not known, the player would be required to replace the ball on its estimated spot (including on, under or against any attached natural objects that the ball had been at rest on, under or against).

Reasons for Change:

- A fundamental principle of golf is to play the ball as it lies; so this should mean that, when a ball at rest is moved, it should be returned to and played from its original spot or as close to that original spot as possible.
- When a player marks the ball's spot with a ball-marker before lifting the ball, the original spot is known and the ball is replaced on the marked spot.
- But when a ball is accidentally moved, the player may not know the exact original spot:
 - Currently, if the ball was at rest anywhere off the putting green, the player must drop the ball as near as possible to its estimated spot and play the ball from where it comes to rest (unless it rolls to where it must be re-dropped under Rule 20-2c).
 - This means that the ball will often not be played from the estimated spot, as the dropped ball is allowed to roll as much as two-club lengths away from that spot.
 - It also means that the ball may end up being played from a better or worse lie than the original lie (such as when the original spot was in the rough and the dropped ball comes to rest in the fairway, or vice versa; or when the ball had been at rest in deep grass and the dropped ball comes to rest on top of the grass).
- Requiring the player to replace the ball on the estimated spot (including being required to replace the ball on, under or against any fixed or growing things it had been at rest on, under or against) would help make sure the ball is played from as close as possible to its original spot and from the same or almost the same lie.
- Replacing the ball on its estimated spot also applies when the player does not know the exact original spot of a ball that was lifted or moved on the putting green, and so the same procedure would apply throughout the course.
- This change should also make it easier for players to understand the Rules by eliminating the confusing concept of "replacing" a ball by dropping it rather than by placing it.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

21. Standard for Deciding Why a Ball Moved

Current Rule: The “weight of evidence” standard is used to decide whether a player (or an opponent) caused the player’s ball to move:

- The decision must be made in the light of all relevant circumstances, evaluating the weight of the evidence and the balance of probabilities (Decision 34-3/9).
- The player will be found to have caused the ball to move if the weight of the evidence indicates that it is more likely than not that he or she was the cause (Decision 18-2/0.5).

But a higher standard (“known or virtually certain”) applies in deciding whether an outside agency (such as an animal, spectator or another player in stroke play) caused a ball to move.

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 9.2, the “known or virtually certain” standard (meaning at least 95% likely) would apply to all questions of fact about why a ball at rest moved:

- A player, opponent or outside influence would be found to have caused the ball to move if the player, opponent or outside influence was known or virtually certain to have caused it to move; otherwise it would be assumed that natural forces caused it to move.

Reasons for Change:

- The weight of the evidence test is often difficult to apply in ball moved situations:
 - Many competing factors need to be balanced, such as what the player did near the ball, the lapse of time before the ball moved, the lie of the ball, the slope and other course conditions near the ball and the presence of wind or weather conditions, and
 - There is no prescribed way of prioritising or balancing these factors.
- The “known or virtually certain” standard would be simpler to apply because it would eliminate most “close calls” where it is hard to know for sure why the ball moved.
- Using this standard would fit well with the new Rule 13.2 that would eliminate the penalty for accidentally causing a ball to move on the putting green:
 - The primary reason for eliminating that penalty is that it is often particularly difficult to decide why a ball moved on the putting green.
 - This is explained further in Explanation for Proposed Rule Change - *When to Replace Ball that Moves on Putting Green*.
 - Given those particular difficulties, using the “known or virtually certain” standard would be more clear-cut and easier to apply, and help avoid the risk of players being penalised for playing from a wrong place (replacing the ball when it should have been played as it lies, or vice versa) based on the same difficult balancing of factors that led to eliminating the penalty for causing the ball to move.
- This Rule change also means that only the single standard of “known or virtually certain” would be used for all ball moved questions, rather than the situation under the current Rules where different standards apply in deciding whether an outside influence moved a ball or whether the player or opponent did so.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

22. Substitution for a Ball Damaged During Play of a Hole

Current Rule: Under Rule 5-3:

- A player is allowed to substitute another ball if during the play of a hole his or her ball in play becomes unfit for play – that is, if it is visibly cut, cracked or out of shape.
- Before lifting a ball to see if it is unfit for play, the player must:
 - Announce his or her intention to the opponent in match play or to the marker or another player in stroke play, and
 - Give that person an opportunity to observe the lifting and replacement and to examine the ball, and if that person wishes to dispute a claim of unfitness, it must be done before the player plays another ball.

Proposed Rule: New Rule 4.2 would revise two aspects of this procedure:

- The player would be allowed to substitute a ball only if the ball in play has become cut or cracked during the play of the hole – not if it is just “out of shape”.
- The player would no longer be required to announce the intention to lift to another person or to give that person a chance to observe the process or examine the ball.

Reasons for Change:

- There is no longer a good reason to allow substitution for a ball in play that has become “out of shape” (which means not fully round), because:
 - The construction and composition of modern golf balls has made it rare for a ball to cease to be round, and
 - The playing characteristics of modern balls are not materially affected except when cut or cracked.
- The “out of shape” language has led to confusion, as some players incorrectly believe that a ball with any scuff or scrape on its surface has become out of shape and therefore is unfit for play.
- Restricting relief only to when a ball is cut or cracked would eliminate this confusion and reinforce the Rule’s intention that a player not be allowed to substitute another ball when the ball in play is merely scratched or scraped.
- There is no compelling need to require the player to announce his or her intention to lift the ball or to give another person the chance to observe the process:
 - Eliminating these requirements would simplify and speed up the process and be consistent with the Rules’ overall approach of trusting the player to act correctly without needing to have another player watch over the process
 - This is explained further in Explanation for Proposed Rule Change - *Elimination of the Requirement to Announce the Player’s Intent to Lift a Ball*.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

23. Substitution of Ball Always Allowed When Taking Relief

Current Rule: A player is allowed to substitute a ball only when taking relief under certain Rules:

- Substitution is allowed when taking penalty relief, such as when a ball is in a water hazard, is unplayable or is lost or out of bounds (Rules 26-1, 27-1, 28).
- Substitution is not allowed when taking free relief, such as relief from obstructions or abnormal ground conditions (Rules 24-2 and 25-1); this means the player must use the original ball (except when that ball is not immediately recoverable).

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 14.3, when taking relief the player would always be allowed the choice to substitute a ball or to use the original ball, including:

- When taking penalty relief as well as when taking free relief (Rules 15-19), and
- Any other time the player is required to drop and play a ball, such as when returning to play from where a previous stroke was made after the stroke is cancelled.

Reasons for Change:

- The requirement to use the original ball in some relief situations but not others is confusing, hard to remember and leads to unnecessary penalties. Taking a consistent approach that always allows a player taking relief the choice to substitute a ball or use the original ball is much simpler.
- There is no need for a different procedure based on whether the player is taking relief with penalty or without penalty:
 - The penalty is applied for reasons having to do with where the ball ended up (lost, out of bounds, in a penalty area or unplayable), not with which ball is played next.
 - For example, if a ball lies in easy reach of the player, there is no reason to require the original ball to be used when taking relief because of interference by an animal hole, while allowing substitution when taking relief because the ball is unplayable.
- This change would eliminate the need when taking free relief to decide whether the original ball is “not immediately recoverable”, which can raise questions in various cases such as when the ball is in a few inches of temporary water or is under a prickly bush.
- This would also draw a clearer and more intuitive line between when substitution is allowed in returning a ball to play and when the original ball must be returned to play:
 - Substitution would be allowed only when a player is taking relief under any Rule – that is, when the player is required or allowed to play the next stroke from somewhere other than where the original ball came to rest.
 - Substitution would not be allowed when a ball was lifted or moved and the Rules require it to be replaced on its original spot – in that case, the original ball must still be used (unless it cannot be recovered with reasonable effort and in a few seconds).

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

24. Time for Search Before Ball is Lost

Current Rule: If a player's ball is not found within 5 minutes after the player or his or her caddie began searching for it:

- The ball is treated as "lost", and
- The player gets a one-stroke penalty and must play another ball from the spot of the previous stroke (that is, must play under penalty of stroke and distance). (Definition of "Lost Ball"; Rule 27-1c.)

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 18.2, the time for a ball search (before the ball becomes lost) would be reduced from 5 minutes to 3 minutes.

Reasons for Change:

- Limiting the search period to 3 minutes is more consistent with the underlying principle that golf is to be played in a prompt and continuous way, without long pauses in play.
- In most cases, if the ball is going to be found, it will be found within the first 3 minutes.
- The total delay for a lost ball can be much longer than the search time alone; for example, it may take 10 minutes or longer to look unsuccessfully for a tee shot including the 5 minutes for search, the walk back to the tee to play another ball under penalty of stroke and distance, and the walk back down the hole to where that ball comes to rest.
- The time taken in each ball search can also have a negative impact on the pace of play of following groups; when there are multiple long ball searches, the cumulative delay can be major for all those playing on the course.
- Although this change may increase the number of lost balls, on average the overall impact should be to speed up play.
- Knowing that the search time is limited to 3 minutes should encourage players to play a provisional ball when they believe there is a chance their ball may not be found.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

25. Touching Line of Play on Putting Green

Current Rule: Under Rule 16-1a, when a player's ball is on the putting green:

- The player is generally prohibited from touching his or her line of putt.
- But there are seven exceptions (such as when removing loose impediments or movable obstructions, when lifting or replacing a ball, when repairing ball marks, etc.).

Proposed Rule: The prohibition of touching the line of play on the putting green would be eliminated:

- There would no longer be a penalty for merely touching the line of play on the putting green (the term "line of play" would apply everywhere on the course including the putting green, and the term "line of putt" would no longer be used).
- But the player would still be subject to the prohibition on improving his or her line of play on the putting green (see new Rule 8.1a, as limited by 8.1b).

Reasons for Change:

- No advantage is gained if a player or his or her caddie merely touches the surface of the putting green on the line where the ball will be played.
- Over time, the prohibition on touching the line of putt has become subject to many exceptions:
 - Current Rule 16-1a lists seven different situations in which a player is allowed to touch the line of putt.
 - The Decisions recognise additional exceptions, such as that there is no penalty if a player accidentally walks on the line of putt.
- The current prohibition is difficult to administer and penalties are not often applied; and those penalties that are applied may be perceived as serving little or no purpose, such as when a caddie accidentally touches the line of putt with the flagstick.
- The change that would allow a player to repair almost all damage on the putting green (see also Explanation for Proposed Rule Change - *Repairing Damage on Putting Green*) is a further reason why the prohibition on merely touching the line of putt is no longer needed.
- Eliminating the prohibition on touching the line of putt would also be consistent with the related change in new Rule 10.2b(2), which would eliminate current Rule 8.2b's prohibition on merely touching the putting green when pointing out the line of play for a ball on the green.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

26. Touching Loose Impediments or Ground in a Penalty Area

Current Rule: When a player's ball is in a water hazard, Rule 13-4 provides (with exceptions) that the player must not:

- Test the condition of the water hazard,
- Touch the water or the ground in the water hazard with a hand or club, or
- Touch or move loose impediments that are in the water hazard.

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 17:

- There would no longer be any special restrictions when a ball is in a "penalty area" (the expanded designation for the area that includes what are now called water hazards).
- A player would be allowed to touch or move loose impediments and touch the ground with hand or club (such as grounding the club right behind the ball) for any reason, subject only to the prohibition on improving conditions for the stroke (see new Rule 8.1a).

Reasons for Change:

- A strict prohibition on touching or moving loose impediments or touching the ground in a water hazard has never been practical, and so a series of exceptions had to be recognised in Rule 13-4 (see Exception 1), Rule 12-1 and various Decisions.
- This has created confusion and complications in applying the Rules, such as needing to decide when a player was or was not "testing", what constitutes touching "as a result of or to prevent falling", and similar questions about applying the many exceptions.
- The current prohibitions have led to penalties that some view as overly harsh, such as:
 - Where the breach was so inconsequential that the player could not have gained any advantage or where even a careful player could not have avoided the penalty, and
 - In a televised competition, where the breach could not be detected by the player or others on the course and was discovered only through later video review.
- Treating a penalty area the same as the general area for these purposes would simplify the Rules, reduce confusion and eliminate unnecessary penalties.
- Removing these restrictions is consistent with the purpose of a penalty area – which is not necessarily to require the player to face a more difficult challenge in playing the ball, but to address the practical need to give the player appropriate relief options because it would often be difficult or impossible to play a ball from the penalty area (such as when the ball is under water).

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

27. Unplayable Ball in Bunker

Current Rule: When taking relief for an unplayable ball in a bunker (Rule 28), the player may:

- Drop and play a ball only in the bunker itself, if taking relief back on a line from the hole to the ball (Rule 28b) or within two club-lengths of the ball (Rule 28c), or
- Take relief outside the bunker only by taking stroke and distance relief from where the previous stroke was made from outside the bunker (Rule 28a); if the previous stroke was made from the bunker, there is no option for relief outside the bunker.

Proposed Rule: The player would have an extra option allowing relief outside the bunker using the back-on-a-line procedure, but for a total of two penalty strokes (New Rule 19.3b).

Reasons for Change:

- It is not uncommon for a player to need to take unplayable ball relief in a bunker, such as when the ball is very close to the bunker wall or lip.
 - Players usually take back-on-a-line or lateral relief under Rule 28b or c, partly because it is time consuming and inconvenient to return to where the previous stroke was made from outside the bunker to take stroke and distance relief (Rule 28a).
 - Once the player makes a stroke at the ball and it stays in the bunker, there is no longer any option for relief outside the bunker – especially if the ball lies in the very back of the bunker where it is almost impossible to gain any practical relief.
- Playing from a bunker can be very difficult for some players, especially when the bunker has steep walls.
 - This can present particular problems in stroke play because the player must finish the hole and so cannot simply pick up and move to the next hole after multiple tries to play the ball from the bunker.
 - Giving those players an option for taking relief outside the bunker would allow them to keep playing rather than be disqualified.
- This extra option would result in a total of two penalty strokes, to make sure that:
 - The penalty is consistent with the significant amount of relief being allowed, and
 - This option does not become commonly used by players who are able to play from a bunker.
- In effect, the player who uses this extra relief option would be penalised one stroke for taking unplayable ball relief and one extra stroke for being allowed to take that relief outside the bunker using the back-on-a-line procedure.
- This relief would be philosophically consistent with other Rules which provide that, when an obstruction or abnormal ground condition interferes with the play of a ball in a bunker, the player has the option to take free relief within the bunker itself or the extra option to take relief for one penalty stroke by playing from back-on-a-line outside the bunker.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

28. Use and Replacement of Clubs Damaged During Round

Current Rule: Rule 4 sets out two complex standards to be applied in sequence for determining whether a player may continue to use or replace a club that is damaged during the round:

- A damaged club may be used only if it was damaged in the “normal course of play”.
- A club damaged in the normal course of play may be replaced with another club only if the damaged club meets an additional test of being “unfit for play”.
- A club damaged outside the normal course of play (such as when slammed against something in anger) must be declared out of play, must not be used for the rest of the round, and must not be replaced even if unfit for play; or else the player is disqualified.

Proposed Rule: Under new Rule 4.1:

- A player would be allowed to keep using and/or to repair any club damaged during the round, no matter what the damage and even if the player damaged it in anger.
- A player would not be allowed to replace a damaged club, except when someone other than the player (or anyone acting for the player) caused the damage.

Reasons for Change:

- This Rule change would greatly simplify the complex Rules on damaged clubs.
- In particular, deciding when a club is “unfit for play” may require a technical judgment that few players have the depth of understanding to make, and even referees can find it challenging to make such judgments quickly and consistently on the course.
- Allowing a player to keep using or to repair any damaged club, regardless of the nature or cause of the damage, would benefit players in several ways.
 - It would help players avoid the disqualification penalties that can arise today when a player hits a club against something in anger and then continues to use the club, not realising that the shaft was slightly bent or some other damage had occurred.
 - The player would be able to choose whether to continue using that club in its damaged state or to use another club; whereas today, for example, a player who damages a putter in anger is not allowed to use it for the rest of the round (even if it is still in a usable form) and so ends up having to putt with a wedge or another club.
- Although there would be times when a damaged club is unusable and cannot be readily repaired on the course (such as when a driver head comes off), the practical ability to get a replacement club is seldom present other than at some elite levels of golf.
- This potential downside from a player’s perspective is outweighed by the ability to use or repair any damaged club, as well as by the significant simplification that results
- This change would be consistent with the overall philosophy that a player normally should play the entire round with only the clubs that he or she started with or added during the round to get to the 14-club limit.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

29. Use of Distance-Measuring Devices

Current Rule: Rule 14-3b, Appendix IA (section 7) and Appendix IV (section 5) cover distance-measuring devices (DMDs):

- The Rule itself prohibits use of DMDs to measure distance during a round.
- But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule allowing such use of DMDs.

Proposed Rule: The current default position in the Rules will be reversed:

- New Rule 4.3 will allow players to use DMDs to measure distance.
- But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule prohibiting such use of DMDs.

Reasons for Change:

- Allowing DMD use is consistent with the principles of the game:
 - Figuring out the distance to the hole or to another location on the course is not one of the decisions that the Rules expect players to make using only their own skill and judgment or only with a caddie's advice.
 - Distance is public information a player may get from anyone; and on most courses, this information is found on sprinkler heads, markers, posts, etc.
- DMD use has become widespread in the 10 or so years since they were introduced, and they are allowed at most clubs throughout the world and in most amateur competitions, including (since 2014) at USGA and R&A amateur championships.
- Given that in many countries the DMD Local Rule has been adopted by most Committees, it would be sensible for this to be a Rule of Golf rather than being permitted by Local Rule.
- Reversing the default position will help avoid the confusion that sometimes exists today when clubs or players do not realise that DMD use requires adoption of a Local Rule.
- At the same time, Committees that are not comfortable with allowing use of electronic devices such as DMDs on their course generally or during a particular competition may still prohibit their use.
- The revised approach will align the Rules with the reality that golfers of all ages increasingly expect to be able to use electronic devices on the course for other purposes that are allowed by the Rules such as looking up a Rule of Golf or checking the weather.
- Embracing and encouraging the use of DMDs should also benefit pace of play as has been the experience at most amateur championships and clubs that have adopted the Local Rule.

Explanation for Proposed Rule Change

30. When to Replace Ball that Moves on the Putting Green

Current Rule: If a player's ball on the putting green moves before the stroke is made:

- The player must replace the ball if it was moved by any player, caddie or outside agency (such as an animal, spectator or moving object).
- But the moved ball must always be played from its new spot if the ball was moved by wind, water or other natural forces (including when the ball moves for no apparent reason because of the effects of gravity).

Proposed Rule: New Rule 13.1c, would revise the procedure for when a ball on the putting green is moved by wind, water or other natural forces, so that it must sometimes be replaced and sometimes be played from its new spot:

- If the ball had been lifted and replaced on its original spot before it moved, the ball must always be replaced on its original spot, regardless of what caused it to move.
- The ball must be played from its new spot only if the ball had not been lifted and replaced before it moved.

Reasons for Change:

- When a ball at rest is moved by natural forces such as the wind, it is normally played as it lies because its movement is considered a continuation of the previous stroke, as no person or object has affected where the ball lies.
- But when the moved ball had already been lifted and replaced, the connection to the previous stroke is no longer obvious.
- This is especially true on the putting green, where a player is allowed to mark, lift and replace a ball for any reason and many players do so as a matter of course.
 - It can be difficult to determine whether a person or object caused the ball to move or whether it was moved by wind or other natural causes.
 - It would simplify the Rules to provide that a ball always must be replaced if it moves from a spot where it had already been lifted and replaced.
- When a ball on the green moves after having come to rest:
 - It can result in outcomes that seem unfair, such as when the ball rolls off the green (sometimes ending up in a bunker or in water) or rolls close to or into the hole.
 - Requiring the ball to be replaced if it had already been lifted and replaced would eliminate such outcomes in those situations.
- This Rule change may also be helpful in conditions of very high wind on the course, as it may allow play to continue in conditions where it might otherwise not be possible or fair because too many balls are being blown from their spot on the green.