

# Rules Modernization Initiative

March 2017

R&A

USGA



# Comprehensive Process to Modernize

- The USGA and The R&A began this initiative 5 years ago
- The Rules departments, committees, and other experts have participated, including representatives from various tours and associations
- The process has included comprehensive analysis, including historical research, analysis of key principles, and a full assessment of options



# Examples of Concerns with the Current Rules

- A desire to make the Rules as **precise and fair** as possible has tended to make them more **complex and technical**
- The Rule book has **hundreds of Rules** and sub-Rules; along with a **500+ page Decisions book** with many “**hidden Rules**” found in **1200+ separate Decisions**
- Answers are sometimes **hard to find**
- Language is often **dense and legalistic**
- Procedures and outcomes are **not always straightforward and intuitive**, and are sometimes seen as **unfair** or reflecting a **hyper-technical** or “**hair-splitting**” approach that may result in **penalties for no obvious reason**

# Two Guiding Themes

- Even far-reaching Rule changes should be open for discussion, but golf's fundamental character and principles such as “**play the ball as it lies and the course as you find it**” must be retained
- Revisions should be assessed with **all golfers** in mind – not only professionals and elite amateurs, but also beginners, high-handicappers, and club and recreational golfers from around the world



# Overall Goals

## Bring the Rules up to date to meet the changing needs of the global game

- The Rules should ...
  - ✓ Be more easily understood and applied by all golfers
  - ✓ Be more consistent, simple and fair
  - ✓ Reinforce the game's longstanding principles and character



# Specific Objectives for the Proposed New Rules

- Greater reliance on **player integrity**; we play a game of honor and **golfers want to follow the Rules**
- Support broader objectives, such as **pace of play** and **environmental stewardship**
- Written using **everyday language** and be easily **translated**
- Make greater use of **visual aids** such as **photos and videos**
- Comprehensively reorganize, including a shorter **Player's Edition** of the most commonly used Rules that most golfers will utilize
- Deliver the Rules using technology, including **mobile devices**



## Some Proposed Changes

- **Relaxed Putting Green Rules:** Players may repair spike marks, animal damage and other damage on the putting green and there is no penalty for merely touching the line of putt. No penalty if a ball played from the putting green hits an unattended flagstick in the hole; players may putt without having the flagstick attended or removed.
- **Elimination or Reduction of “Ball Moved” Penalties:** No penalty for accidentally moving a ball on the putting green or in searching for a ball; and a player is not responsible for causing a ball to move unless it is “virtually certain” that he or she did so.
- **Relaxed Rules for “Penalty Areas” (Currently Called “Water Hazards”):** Red and yellow-marked penalty areas may now cover areas of desert, jungle, lava rock, etc., in addition to areas of water; expanded use of red penalty areas where lateral relief is allowed; and no penalty for touching the ground, water or loose impediments in a penalty area.

# Some Proposed Changes

- **Relaxed Bunker Rules:** No penalty for touching loose impediments in a bunker or for generally touching the sand with a hand or club. A limited set of restrictions (such as no grounding the club right next to the ball) is kept to preserve the challenge of playing from the sand; however, an extra-relief option was added for an unplayable ball in a bunker, allowing the ball to be played from outside the bunker with a two-stroke penalty.
- **Relying on player integrity:** A player’s “reasonable judgment” when estimating or measuring a spot, point, line, area or distance will be upheld, even if video evidence later shows it to be wrong; and elimination of announcement procedures when lifting a ball to identify it or to see if it is damaged.

# Some Proposed Changes

- **Pace-of-Play Support:** Reduced time for searching for a lost ball (from five minutes to three); encouragement of “ready golf” in stroke play; recommending that players take no more than 40 seconds to play a stroke (and usually play more quickly than that); and other changes intended to help with pace of play.
- **Simplified way of taking relief:** A new procedure for taking relief by dropping a ball in and playing it from a specific relief area; relaxed procedures for dropping a ball, allowing the ball to be dropped from just above the ground or any growing thing or other object on the ground.

# Some Rules Remain Unchanged

Not every Rule is included in the proposed changes (many remain under discussion):

- **No free relief for a ball in a divot hole in the fairway** – A fundamental challenge of the game is to deal with whatever lie your ball comes to rest in (i.e., “play the ball as it lies”). Both good and bad lies are intrinsic to the game.
- **Stroke-and-distance** – Still under review
- **Equipment Rules** - Not part of this review
- **Amateur Status Rules** – Not part of this review

# Feedback & Evaluation Period

- Given the scope of the initiative, we previewed the proposed new Rules on **March 1, 2017** and commenced a **six-month feedback period** that **concludes August 31, 2017**.
- **Golfers can submit feedback by:**
  - ✓ Visiting [usga.org/rules](https://usga.org/rules) and participating in a joint global survey
  - ✓ Using #GolfRules2019 and @usga on social media channels
  - ✓ Emailing the USGA Rules team at [rules@usga.org](mailto:rules@usga.org)
  - ✓ Calling the USGA Rules team at 908-326-1850
- After the feedback and evaluation period, we plan to finish the Rules and other materials in **2018** and then implement the revised new Rules on **January 1, 2019**.

# Explanatory Materials

- A wide array of explanatory materials have been developed and may be accessed at [usga.org/rules](http://usga.org/rules). A few examples of key materials include:
  - ✓ *Overview of the Rules Modernization Initiative*: Goals, Proposed Changes and Process for Implementation in 2019
  - ✓ *Draft New Rules of Golf for 2019*: The Full Text of Proposed Rules 1-24 and Definitions
  - ✓ *Draft Player's Edition of the New Rules of Golf for 2019*: Written from the perspective of “you” the golfer, this shorter version covers the most commonly used Rules and is meant to be the rule book golfers will use when finalized and adopted in 2019
  - ✓ *Explanation for Each Major Proposed Change in the New Rules of Golf for 2019*: One-page summaries of each major proposed change
  - ✓ *Summary charts*: Covering the major proposed changes
  - ✓ *Videos and Infographics*: Visual explanations of the proposed Rules

# Milestones and Periods



# USGA Contact & Guidance

Please direct questions and requests for guidance and assistance to:

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**Thank you!**

