

Rules Update

BY ED GOWAN AND LORRAINE THIES

2006 Changes to the Rules Decisions and Amateur Status

Joint committees of the United States Golf Association and the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, Scotland, make the Rules of Golf and Amateur Status. The Rules of Golf are revised every four years. The next scheduled revision will take place in 2008. In the interim years, as situations arise that require attention and consideration, new Decisions are written so that similar situations are treated consistently throughout the world. For 2006, there are 36 new Decisions and 66 revisions to existing Decisions.

We'll present a few of the significant changes in this article. If you'd like to see the complete listing of the new and revised decisions, go to azgolf.org, click on Rules of Golf and then Rules & Decision.



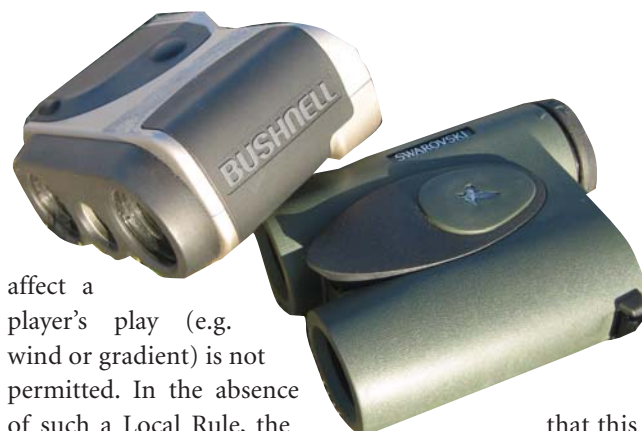
NEW DECISIONS

DISTANCE MEASURING DEVICES

With the rapid increase in availability of electronic measuring devices, both on golf carts and with hand-held units, the USGA and R&A have made a shift in philosophy and now permit the use of such devices during competition.

Q. May a Committee, by Local Rule, permit the use of distance measuring devices?

A. Yes. A Committee may establish a Local Rule allowing players to use devices that measure distance only. However, the use of devices that gauge or measure other conditions that might



affect a player's play (e.g. wind or gradient) is not permitted. In the absence of such a Local Rule, the use of a distance measuring device would be contrary to Rule 14-3. (New Decision)

The key is that the provision MUST be written into a Local Rule in order to

Tournament Committees can now write a local rule allowing use of electronic devices during tournaments

be in effect. Many feel that this change will help to speed up play. Depending on the type of device used, this may or may not be the case. Certainly, GPS units that are found on golf carts or hand held units that are satellite based are easy to use and can

impact play – as long as carts aren't required to stay on cart paths. Laser-type units that require you have an object to reflect a beam, may actually have the opposite effect, as recently demonstrated by a professional tour's test.

The USGA, Arizona Golf Association, the Arizona Women's Golf Association and the Southwest Section PGA have decided NOT to permit the use of these devices in their respective tournaments and have issued statements to that effect. (See sidebar.)

PUTTING WITH FOOT ON EXTENSION OF LINE OF PUTT BEHIND BALL

How many times have you found yourself in a situation where you have a short tap-in and would like to hole out, but taking a normal stance would require that you stand on another player's line? Decision 16-1e/2 has been added to address this type of situation.

Q. A player holes a short putt from a stance astride or with either foot touching, an extension of his line of putt behind the ball. The act was inadvertent or to avoid standing on another player's line of putt or prospective line of putt. Is the player subject to penalty under Rule 16-1e?

A. No. The purpose of Rule 16-1e is to prevent a "croquet" style of putting. In this case the player did not use the stance for that purpose. (New)

BALL MOVES AFTER LOOSE IMPEDIMENT IS REMOVED CLOSE TO THE BALL

Prior to 2004, the rules stated that, if a loose impediment was removed within a club length of the ball, and the ball moved, the player was deemed to have caused it to move. In other words, whether the player did anything to cause the movement or not, he was penalized. That provision was removed in the 2004 release of the rules. Although this was a good change, it resulted in confusion among golfers. People began to think that if they removed a loose impediment within a club length of the ball, they weren't penalized, even if the ball moved



It's a matter of fact whether a player causes his ball to move when he removes a loose impediment.

BECAUSE of the action..

Decision 18-2a/30.5 clarifies this issue.

Q. Through the green, a player's ball moves after the player removed a loose impediment near, but not touching, the ball. What is the ruling?

A. It is a question of fact whether the player caused his ball to move and thus incurred a penalty under Rule 18-2a. The Committee should evaluate all the evidence and make a decision based on the weight of that evidence. The Committee should consider a number of factors, including the proximity of the loose impediment to the ball, the force and means with which the loose impediment was removed, the presence of a strong wind and the delay, if any, between the removal of the loose impediment and the movement of the ball. Any doubt as to whether the player caused the ball to move should be resolved against the player. (New)

REVISED DECISIONS

Editor's Note: These are decisions that have been changed because of incidents that made the original decision inconsistent with other rulings already printed. The Committees then discuss which direction to take to maintain a consistent outcome for similar situations. For those who might believe that nothing new can happen, just read some of the changes.

DAMAGE TO A CLUB DURING NORMAL COURSE OF PLAY

Rule 4-3 states that a player may repair or replace a club during a round if it's been damaged during normal course of play. Decision 4-3/1 provides guidance on what is considered "normal course of play." This decision has been revised and has significantly broadened the definition to include acts that previously would have been excluded from normal course of play.

Q. In Rule 4-3a, what is meant by the term “normal course of play?”

A. The term “normal course of play” is intended to cover all reasonable acts but specifically excludes cases of abuse.

In addition to making a stroke, practice swing or practice stroke, examples of acts that are in the “normal course of play” include the following:

- removing or replacing a club in the bag;
- using a club to search for or retrieve a ball;
- leaning on a club while waiting to play, teeing a ball or removing a ball from the hole; or
- accidentally dropping a club.

Examples of acts that are not in the “normal course of play” include the following:

- throwing a club in anger or otherwise;
- ‘slamming’ a club into a bag; or
- intentionally striking something (e.g., the ground or a tree) with the club other than during a stroke, practice swing or practice stroke. (Revised)

EXCHANGING DISTANCE INFORMATION

Another significant change to the decisions involves providing information to opponents or fellow competitors about distance. Prior to 2006 players could only exchange information about distances from “permanent objects” (e.g. from the tee to a bunker or from a sprinkler head to the putting green,) because such information was public in nature. Decision 8-1/2 has been expanded to include any distance information without concern for how it was determined.

8-1/2 EXCHANGING DISTANCE INFORMATION

Information regarding the distance between two objects is public information and not advice. It is therefore permissible for players to exchange information relating to the distance between two objects. For example, a player may ask anyone, including his opponent, fellow-competitor or either of their cad-



Winning Hole-in-One contests will still result in loss of amateur status

dies, the distance between his ball and the hole. (Revised)

RULES OF AMATEUR STATUS

For the past several years, the USGA and the R&A have been working on creating a set of rules for amateurs that are the same for both entities. This was successfully accomplished this year with the release of a set of Rules for Amateur Status, which will go into effect January 1, 2006. We'll outline a few of the more significant changes to the rules. To view the complete listing of the Rules of Amateur Status go to azgolf.org click on Rules of Golf and then Amateur Status.

HOLE-IN-ONE AWARDS

Probably the most significant change to the Amateur Status Rules has to do with hole-in-one prizes. Until now, anyone who accepted a hole-in-one prize in excess of the amounts prescribed within the rules (currently \$750) would lose his amateur status.

The rule now states that as long as a golfer is playing a round of golf, there is no limit to the value of the prize that he

can receive for a hole-in-one. The key point to remember is that it MUST be made during a round of golf. It does NOT apply to hole-in-one contests where individuals hit balls on a particular hole or driving range in an attempt to make a hole in one. In those situations, if the individual accepts the prize, he will lose his amateur status if the prize is cash or has a value in excess of \$750.

REIMBURSEMENT OF EXPENSES

Until now, only golfers competing in team competitions were eligible to have their expenses reimbursed. The new rules have now been expanded to include individual competitions. If the amount of expenses exceeds \$300, the governing association (Arizona Golf Association in Arizona) must be the middleman. Those interested in providing expenses to the player must apply to AGA, which will accept the money and pay back to the player reasonable expenses for travel, hotel and other tournament-related expenditures that are backed-up by receipts.

The events must be significant, not just friendly member-guests. Those interested may address a reimbursement request to Ed Gowan, Executive Director, at the AGA office.

JOINT STATEMENT BY AGA, AWGA AND SOUTHWEST SECTION PGA REGARDING DISTANCE MEASURING DEVICES

The USGA has announced a new Decision 14-3 / 0.5, which (beginning January 1, 2006) allows a Committee to permit the use of distance-measuring devices by Local Rule. This applies to devices that measure distance only, not other conditions that might affect a player's play (e.g., wind or gradient).

In keeping with the spirit of the game of golf, in protecting the game's traditions, and in preventing over-reliance on technology rather than skill, the Southwest Section PGA Board of Directors, the Arizona Golf Association and the Arizona Women's Golf Association join in announcing that "electronic devices" or "distance-measuring devices" of any kind, including, but not necessarily limited to, range finders, GPS devices or binocular yardage aids, MAY NOT be used in any Southwest Section PGA sponsored or co-sponsored event or in any AGA or AWGA sponsored event.

Our organizations believe that neither the sponsoring organization nor the player should be (or feel) compelled to incur additional equipment expenses beyond what is currently necessary to conduct or participate in a competition.

The Associations agree with the USGA that in the absence of this Local Rule, the use of distance-measuring devices of any kind remains contrary to the Rules of Golf. ”

Books on the Rules of Golf, Decisions on the Rules of Golf and Amateur Status are available through the AGA at 602-944-3035 or 800-458-8484.

Be sure to visit the AGA's website and take the monthly rules quiz (azgolf.org and click on Rules of Golf). Each month, the person with the lowest score will receive a gift certificate for the AGA's logo store.

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