



Rule of the Month

December 1, 2018

So It Begins

As we approach the end of another year of Rule of the Month articles, we want to thank our loyal readers for once again making us the people's choice as the most clicked on link at oga.org. Since the first of the year, you've navigated through 110 questions and answers spread over 11 articles. You've also asked a lot of good questions and proved, once again, that OGA members take a serious interest in the Rules of Golf.

So, as a reward, and per our annual custom, we are giving you a holiday exam break and will instead focus on a general topic. But before we start, we'd like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and the most joyous of holiday seasons and a new year filled with golf, sportsmanship, health, happiness and new friends.

On January 1st, the payoff of five years' worth of work and collaboration between the USGA and the R&A arrives when the 2019 Rules of Golf take effect – the result of a five-year project that culminated with the most extensive overhaul to the Rules in the history of the game of golf. While a lot has changed, many things have stayed the same. To really get a head start on others and be ready for next season, you might consider attending one of several OGA Rules of Golf Workshops that will take place around the state between now and the end of March. More information can be found at <http://oga.org/rules/rules-workshops>.

Below are a few of the major changes for 2019:

- Player integrity matters even more as the new Rules reinforce the high standards of conduct expected from players and gives Committees the discretion to disqualify players for serious misconduct. Committees are also now given broad authority to adopt their own code of player conduct and to set penalties for the breach of the standards in that code.
- Pace of play should be much improved with changes that include a three-minute limit for a ball search and the encouragement to play ready golf in stroke play. Additionally, a new form of stroke play is now recognized that sets a maximum hole score for players.
- Caddies and partners must not stand behind the player on the extension of the line of play once the player begins to take his or her stance.
- There is no penalty for accidental movement of your ball on the putting green. Once a ball on the putting green has been marked, lifted and replaced and then subsequently moves for any reason, it must be replaced.
- A player may repair almost any damage (including spike marks and animal damage but not including natural imperfections) on the putting green.
- There is no penalty for accidentally hitting the flagstick with a putt. The flagstick may be left in the hole for a stroke, regardless of where the ball lies.
- The phrase "water hazard" has been replaced. Red and yellow-marked "penalty areas" may now cover areas of desert, jungle, lava rock, etc., in addition to areas of water.
- Every time you drop a ball under a Rule, it will be dropped from knee height.
- When you drop a ball, it must be dropped in the prescribed relief area, come to rest in the relief area and be played from the relief area. The relief area is measured by measuring one or two club lengths (which is defined as the longest club the player has during the round, other than a putter).
- Pro shops everywhere are rejoicing as a player's right to substitute a ball during play of a hole has been greatly expanded. The topic is too complicated to cover here, but rest assured an upcoming Rule of the Month article will teach you what you need to know.
- Anytime a ball is in the teeing area, whether in play or not, it may be repositioned anywhere in the teeing area and may be teed.
- Loose impediments may be removed anywhere on the course including in bunkers and penalty areas. You may also now ground your club in a penalty area, but certain prohibitions for doing so in a bunker still remain.
- There is no longer a penalty for double hitting your ball during a stroke. Gone also is a penalty if your ball hits you or your equipment after a stroke.
- After completing play on the course for the day, a player may practice on the course even if required to play the same course on the next day.

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