

## A GUIDE TO DECISIONS ON THE RULES OF GOLF

Each year, the United States Golf Association (USGA) and The R&A receive thousands of inquiries regarding clarification of the Rules of Golf. In order to help millions of golfers around the world better understand how these detailed Rules are applied and interpreted, the USGA and The R&A develop the comprehensive Decisions on the Rules of Golf. The format is geared towards questions and answers and is designed to be used as a reference for golf administrators and those with an interest in the Rules of the game.

Since 1951, the USGA and The R&A have been meeting regularly in order to establish a uniform code of Rules. However, each year brings about new questions that are not specifically addressed in the Rules of Golf, requiring Committees from both organisations to meet to discuss these new questions and arrive at a decision with which both the USGA and The R&A agree. Many of these agreed positions then find their way into the Decisions on the Rules of Golf, which is amended every two years in order to keep up with the ever evolving game of golf.

The purpose of the Decisions on the Rules of Golf is to clarify matters that may not be entirely clear from the Rules of Golf. The Rules of Golf should be consulted in the first instance, but if a question cannot be answered by reference to the Rules, the solution may be found in the “Decisions book”.

The Decisions book also contains the full text of the Rules of Golf. The Rules of Golf are amended every four years and the latest edition of the Rules became effective on 1 January 2012.

In the Decisions book, Decisions are listed under the Rule number and sub section that is considered most pertinent to the facts of the case. For example, if a Decision relates to the removal of a loose impediment in a hazard, it will be listed under Rule 13-4 (Ball in Hazard; Prohibited Actions) as 13-4/#.

Decisions that apply generally to an entire Rule may simply be listed by the Rule number, followed by a number. For example, if a Decision relates to whether a ball at rest is deemed to have moved, it will be listed under Rule 18 (Ball at Rest Moved) as 18/#.

If a Decision has been introduced for the first time to the latest edition of the book, the word “New” is contained in parenthesis at the end of the Decision. If an existing Decision has been amended in the latest edition of the book, the word “Revised” is contained in parenthesis at the end of the Decision. In addition, Decisions are sometimes withdrawn because they are no longer necessary, or re-numbered so that they can be more easily accessed by the reader. For ease of reference, all the amendments to the previous edition of the book are contained in the section entitled “Amendments to the 2010–2011 Edition”.

Where a Decision number is listed as “Reserved” this means that this Decision has been withdrawn at some point in the past but, rather than

re-number the Decisions following it, the number is held in reserve until a new Decision is introduced and given the vacant number.

The best method for consistently and efficiently locating Decisions that are relevant to the query that has arisen is through use of the Decisions book Index. For guidance on how best to utilise the Index please refer to the "Introduction to the Index" on page 582.

## **PRINCIPAL CHANGES INTRODUCED IN THE 2012 CODE**

### **Definitions**

#### **Addressing the Ball**

*The Definition is amended so that a player has addressed the ball simply by grounding his club immediately in front of or behind the ball, regardless of whether or not he has taken his stance. Therefore, the Rules generally no longer provide for a player addressing the ball in a hazard. (See also related change to Rule 18-2b)*

### **Rules**

#### **Rule 1-2. Exerting Influence on Movement of Ball or Altering Physical Conditions**

*The Rule is amended to establish more clearly that, if a player intentionally takes an action to influence the movement of a ball or to alter physical conditions affecting the playing of a hole in a way that is not permitted by the Rules, Rule 1-2 applies only when the action is not already covered in another Rule. For example, a player improving the lie of his ball is in breach of Rule 13-2 and therefore that Rule would apply, whereas a player intentionally improving the lie of a fellow-competitor's ball is not a situation covered by Rule 13-2 and, therefore, is governed by Rule 1-2.*

#### **Rule 6-3a. Time of Starting**

*Rule 6-3a is amended to provide that the penalty for starting late, but within five minutes of the starting time, is reduced from disqualification to loss of the first hole in match play or two strokes at the first hole in stroke play. Previously this penalty reduction could be introduced as a condition of competition.*

#### **Rule 12-1. Seeing Ball; Searching for Ball**

*Rule 12-1 is reformatted for clarity. In addition, it is amended to (i) permit a player to search for his ball anywhere on the course when it may be covered by sand and to clarify that there is no penalty if the ball is moved in these circumstances, and (ii) apply a penalty of one stroke under Rule 18-2a if a player moves his ball in a hazard when searching for it when it is believed to be covered by loose impediments.*

#### **Rule 13-4. Ball in Hazard; Prohibited Actions**

*Exception 2 to Rule 13-4 is amended to permit a player to smooth sand or soil in a hazard at any time, including before playing from that hazard, provided it is for the sole purpose of caring for the course and Rule 13-2 is not breached.*

#### **Rule 18-2b. Ball Moving After Address**

*A new Exception is added that exonerates the player from penalty if his ball moves after it has been addressed when it is known or virtually certain that he did not cause the ball to move. For example, if it is a gust of wind that moves the ball after it has been addressed, there is no penalty and the ball is played from its new position.*

#### **Rule 19-1. Ball in Motion Deflected or Stopped; By Outside Agency**

*The note is expanded to prescribe the various outcomes when a ball in motion has been deliberately deflected or stopped by an outside agency.*

#### **Rule 20-7c. Playing from Wrong Place; Stroke Play**

*Note 3 is amended so that if a player is to be penalised for playing from a wrong place, in most cases the penalty will be limited to two strokes, even if another Rule has been breached prior to his making the stroke.*

#### **Appendix IV**

*A new Appendix is added to prescribe general regulations for the design of devices and other equipment, such as tees, gloves and distance measuring devices.*