



## WGA Golf Rules Series Overview of Rule Changes for 2019

(See link below for videos to go along  
with each rule change description)

Source: <https://www.pgatour.com/long-form/2019/01/01/biggest-rules-changes-golf-2019.html>

# Overview: Changes Most Likely to Impact WGA Players

## **Dropping a ball:**

Drop a ball from knee height rather than shoulder height. Ball must land/remain in the relief area. Drop twice, then place where the ball hit the ground. If it still won't stay on that spot, place it on the nearest spot where it will stay.

## **Relief Area:**

Always measured with your longest club except your putter. You cannot shrink the relief area by using a shorter club. This relief area applies any time you take relief whether free or penalty, except that relief from lateral penalty areas is two club lengths vs. one.

## **Eliminated Penalties:**

Most common are double hit, moving a ball during search, ball accidentally hits person or equipment,

## **Bunkers:**

Can now move loose impediments (can't move the ball).

Can touch the sand, but still can't ground club, touch during practice swing, or test

## **Penalty Areas (formerly hazards):**

May now ground club, touch the ground or water and move loose impediments in penalty areas

## **Putting Greens:**

Repair any damage to the green not just ball marks (not aeration holes, wear, etc.)

Can touch your line if you don't improve it

Replace a ball that moves for any reason in the original spot

No penalty for hitting the flagstick

## **Lost Ball/Provisional:**

3 minutes to search vs. 5

No penalty for accidentally moving ball during search

Option to play a provisional any time before ball is found

## **Unplayable lie:**

Relief is always within 1 club length of spot or line vs. on the spot or line 3 minutes to search vs. 5

No penalty for accidentally moving ball during search

Option to play a provisional any time before ball is found

## **Clubs and balls:**

You can use a damaged club but replace it only if damaged by 'outside influence/natural forces'

More restrictive definition of ball unfit for play (cut/cracked, not out of shape)



# Dropping a ball

## Summary:

**Drop a ball from knee height rather than shoulder height. Ball must land/remain in the relief area. Drop twice, then place where the ball hit the ground. If it still won't stay on that spot, place it on the nearest spot where it will stay.**

## The Fine Print:

The ball must be dropped straight down from **knee height**.

Knee height means the height of the player's knee when in a standing position.

The ball must fall straight down, without the player throwing, spinning or rolling it. The ball must not touch any part of the player's body or equipment before it hits the ground. If it rolls against the player's foot or equipment accidentally after striking the ground, the ball is in play.

Once dropped, the ball must land in and come to rest in the relief area. If the ball rolls outside the relief area it must be dropped again, then if it rolls out a second time, the ball must be placed where it first struck the ground on the second drop just as we do today.

If the placed ball will not stay at rest on that spot, it must be placed on that spot a second time and if it still will not stay there, it must be placed on the nearest spot where it will stay at rest, no nearer the hole.

If a Drop Zone is being used, the ball when dropped must land and come to rest in the Drop Zone

# The Relief Area

## Summary:

**Always measured with your longest club except your putter. You cannot shrink the relief area by using a shorter club. This relief area applies any time you take relief whether free or penalty, except that relief from lateral penalty areas is two club lengths vs. one.**

## The Fine Print:

The Relief Area is the area where a player must drop a ball when taking relief under a Rule.

The Relief Area is a defined area that is equal to the length of the longest club carried by a player, other than a putter. No matter what club is used to measure, the ball must come to rest within the longest club, other than a putter. Using a putter or sand wedge will not provide a smaller relief area.

The one club-length Relief Area will be uniform for all procedures, except when a player is using the two club-length “Lateral Relief” option from a red penalty area or from an unplayable ball.

When taking free relief or penalty relief, the original ball or another ball must be dropped in the relief area

# Eliminated Penalties

## Summary:

**Most common are double hit, moving a ball during search, ball accidentally hits person or equipment**

## The Fine Print:

There is now NO penalty for an accidental double hit. All accidental deflections are treated the same way; NO penalty and the ball is played as it lies.

During a search for a ball, there is NO penalty if a ball is moved by the player or his caddie. In all cases, the ball will be replaced, it will never be dropped.

There is now NO penalty if a ball in motion accidentally hits the player, caddie, his equipment, or the flagstick whether removed or attended. There is only a penalty if it is deliberate or if the player or caddie deliberately positions equipment to stop a ball in motion.

There is still NO penalty for a ball or ball-marker accidentally moved on the putting green.

There is now NO penalty for carrying a non-conforming club, penalty applies only for using it.

On the putting green a ball which strikes a moving leaf after a putt, is NO longer cancelled and replayed. The ball will be played as it lies.

If a ball has been moved by an Outside Influence, it must be replaced in all cases including when the spot is not known. It will NEVER be dropped.

# Bunkers

## Summary:

**Can now move loose impediments (can't move the ball).**

**Can now touch the sand, except**

**-- not directly in front of or behind your ball (except moving loose impediments**

**-- during a practice swing or backswing**

**--to test sand or gain information**

**No penalty for touching sand in anger or leaning on a club**

## The Fine Print:

Loose impediments in a bunker may now be removed or touched, provided the ball does not move. If the ball moves as a result, there is a one stroke penalty and the ball must be replaced. Hence, a Local Rule for Stones in Bunkers will no longer exist as the Rules will allow their removal.

The Rules will now allow the player to generally touch the sand in a bunker with a hand or a club, but there are limitations. For example:

You cannot touch the sand in a bunker when making a practice swing or in the backswing for the stroke.

You cannot deliberately touch the sand in the bunker with your hand, club, rake or other object to test the condition of the sand to learn information for the stroke.

You cannot touch the sand in a bunker with a club in the area right in front of or right behind the ball, except when searching or removing a loose impediment or movable obstruction.

There is NO longer a penalty for striking the sand in anger or frustration, or for leaning on a club in the sand away from the ball while waiting to play.

# Penalty Areas (formerly hazards)

## Summary:

**See the new penalty area detailed rules sheets**

**May now ground club, touch the ground or water and move loose impediments in penalty areas**

The Fine Print:

## **PENALTY AREAS**

Penalty Area is the new name for Water Hazard. Penalty Areas will still be marked either Yellow or Red.

In a Penalty Area the player can now ground the club lightly behind the ball, move a loose impediment, take a practice swing and touch the ground or the water.

Opposite Margin relief from a Red Penalty area is not available by the Rule. This option must be noted on the Local Rules sheet each week for each specific Red Penalty Area.

NOTE: As was the case previously, the player cannot take relief from Abnormal Ground Conditions including Immovable Obstructions or an Embedded Ball within a penalty area.

# Putting Greens

## Summary:

**Repair any damage to the green not just ball marks (not aeration holes, wear, etc.)**

**Can touch your line if you don't improve it**

**Replace a ball that moves for any reason in the original spot**

**No penalty for hitting the flagstick**

The Fine Print:

## PUTTING GREENS

Damage to a putting green may be repaired. Damage is described in the Rule and it means any damage caused by a person or outside influence and includes ball marks, old hole plugs, turf plugs, shoe damage (such as spike marks) and scrapes or indentations caused by equipment or the flagstick. Any repair must be done promptly. It does NOT include natural surface imperfection, disease, aeration hole or natural wear of the hole.

The line of play on the putting green may now be touched, including when pointing out a line for putting, but the line must not be improved beyond what is now permitted when repairing damage, i.e.: the player may NOT create a pathway or channel to the hole.

If the player's ball on the putting green moves after the player had already lifted and replaced the ball, the ball MUST be replaced on its original spot, which if not known must be estimated. This is the case no matter what caused the replaced ball to move, including natural forces (wind).

## FLAGSTICK

The player can now putt leaving the flagstick in the hole, but the player must decide this before making the stroke. There is NO penalty if the ball strikes a flagstick left in the hole prior to the stroke, or for a ball accidentally striking a flagstick that is attended or removed.

If the player elects to putt with the flagstick in the hole, it must NOT be moved after the stroke to affect where a ball in motion may come to rest. It may only be removed when there is no reasonable possibility that the ball will strike the flagstick.

If a ball rests against a flagstick in the hole and part of the ball is below the level of the lip, the ball will be considered holed, even if the entire ball is not below the surface. There is no longer a requirement to move the flagstick to see if the ball falls into the hole. The ball may be simply picked up.



# Lost/Provisional Balls

## Summary:

**3 minutes to search vs. 5**

**No penalty for accidentally moving ball during search**

**Option to play a provisional any time before ball is found**

## The Fine Print:

The time to search for a ball is reduced from 5 minutes to 3 minutes. The time of search still starts when the player or caddie begin to search. If the original ball is found, the provisional ball must be abandoned.

Once the search time has begun, there is NO penalty if the ball is accidentally moved during the search by anyone including the player or caddie.

Simply replace the ball in its estimated position.

The player can now go back to where the ball was last played and play a provisional ball at any time before the original ball is found.

The player must still announce that the ball about to be played is a provisional ball. The player must use the word “provisional” or otherwise clearly indicate that he or she is playing the ball provisionally.

# Embedded Ball

## Summary:

## New relief area definition

### The Fine Print:

The relief procedure has changed for an embedded ball.

The relief area starts at the spot right behind where the ball is embedded. A ball must be dropped in the one club-length relief area, not nearer the hole than this spot, and in the General Area.

There is NO longer a requirement to announce to your marker or another player your intention to mark and lift the ball to check if it is embedded, but it is still good practice to do so.

A ball is NOT embedded if it is below the level of the ground as a result of anything other than the player's previous stroke, such as when the ball was dropped in taking relief under a Rule.

As with other relief procedures, a ball may be substituted and dropped when taking relief. The original ball may be used, but it is not necessary.

# Dropping Options from an Unplayable Ball

## Refresher—unplayable lie options old rules

1. Hit again from the same spot
2. Take a legal drop two club lengths from the ball
3. Drop the anywhere behind the ball on the line between the ball and the flag. There is no limit to how far back the player can go on this line, even if it improves the lie (eg fairway vs. rough)

## Changes Summary:

**Options 1 is now within 1 club relief area of the original shot**

**Option 3 now within 1 club length relief area of the line vs. on the line itself**

### The Fine Print:

When using the “Stroke-and-Distance Relief” option, the player must now estimate where the previous stroke was played and drop a ball within one club-length of that spot not nearer the hole.

When using the “Back-on-the-Line Relief” option or keeping the place where the ball lies between you and the hole, the player can now drop in a one club-length relief area rather than exactly on the line itself as was done previously.

The player can go back on the line as far as he wants, select a point on the line and drop within one club-length of that point, not nearer the hole.

(The player should indicate the point on the line by using an object such as a coin or tee.) The ball when dropped cannot go forward of this point.

Using the 2 club-length “Lateral Relief” option when a ball is unplayable, the ball must stay in the 2 club-length relief area when dropped. It can no longer roll 2 club-lengths from where it strikes the ground.

# Alignment

## Summary:

### **Nobody can help you line up for a shot and you can't use an object to help with alignment**

#### The Fine Print:

No one can help the player with his alignment for the stroke. This is an essential skill which the player must do for himself.

A caddie is NO longer allowed to stand behind the player to help with alignment. At the moment the player begins to take his stance, the caddie must not deliberately stand directly behind the player. The penalty is two strokes in stroke play.

There is one exception which applies only on the Putting Green. The penalty can be avoided if the player backs away and starts again without the caddie directly behind him. Provided the player backs away and starts again on the Putting Green, there is no penalty.

The player cannot set something down (such as a club) to help with alignment for a stroke. Once this is done the penalty is two strokes in stroke play.

# Clubs and Balls

## Summary:

**You can use a damaged club**

**You can replace a club only if it was damaged by 'outside influence or natural forces'**

**More restrictive definition of ball unfit for play**

The Fine Print:

## CLUBS

No matter how a club is damaged, even by abusing it, the player can continue to use the club in its damaged state for the rest of the round, but he will NOT be allowed to replace it.

There will be NO replacement of a club unfit for play (such as a cracked driver face), unless the damage is caused by an outside influence or natural forces. No matter what the nature or cause of the damage, the damaged club is treated as conforming for the rest of that round only.

The player will be allowed to have the damaged club repaired but the repair is limited to the original components of the club - the same grip, shaft and clubhead. Damage that existed prior to the round must not be repaired.

A club MUST still conform when starting a new round or when starting a play-off in stroke play, if it is to be used. There is NO penalty for carrying a non-conforming club, only for using it.

## BALLS

The player is NO longer required to announce that he is lifting the ball to determine if it is cut or cracked or for identification. Simply mark the ball and lift it.

Cut or Cracked replaces the term Ball Unfit for Play. Hence a ball out of shape may not be replaced. A ball can only be replaced if it is cut or cracked and that damage happened on the same hole.

# Preferred Lies

## Summary:

**No longer required to mark ball before moving it 1 club length**

## The Fine Print:

The position of the ball may be marked before being lifted, but it is not required. Simply lift the ball and place a ball once within one club length of the original spot, but not nearer the hole. As with other relief procedures, a ball may be substituted when a ball is lifted.

# Less Relevant (to us) Rule Changes

## **TEMPORARY IMMOVABLE OBSTRUCTIONS**

The TIO Local Rule was recrafted to enable a player to treat a TIO as an Immovable Obstruction when any physical interference exists, if the player so chooses. This should simplify the process for players when taking relief. When a player has both Physical Interference and Line of Sight Interference, he has a choice of either procedure. However, once this choice is made, the other option may not be used.

## **CADDIES**

A caddie will now be able to mark, lift and replace the player's ball (if he lifted it) on the putting green ONLY, without needing authorization. The player is still responsible for any related breach of the Rules.

A caddie will NO longer be able to align the player while he is taking his stance for any stroke. There are strict Rules about where the caddie may deliberately stand when the player begins to take his stance. Other than on the putting green, there is no way out of a penalty if the caddie is deliberately standing directly behind the player when he starts to take his stance.

## **DISTANCE MEASURING DEVICES**

Although in 2019 the Rules of Golf will allow the everyday use of Distance Measuring Devices (DMD's) without measuring elevation changes; the PGA TOUR will be adopting a Local Rule on our Hard Card which will prevent the use of DMD's during any tournament rounds.

Penalty for first breach of this Local Rule during a tournament round is two strokes in stroke play; second breach during the same round Disqualification.

DMD's without elevation change, will still be permitted in PGA TOUR pre-tournament Pro-Ams, Open Qualifying rounds and stages of Q school, except the Q school finals.