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Summary of 2008 Rules of Golf Changes

(with 2007 and 2008 wording)

The United States Golf Association, in conjunction with the R&A in St. Andrews, Scotland, writes, interprets and maintains the Rules of Golf to guard the tradition and integrity of the game. The two organizations are joint authors and owners of The Rules of Golf and Decisions on the Rules of Golf. The Rules are updated every four years, and the most recent revision took effect January 1, 2008. A summary of those changes are outlined below.

Rule 12-2 – Identifying Ball (paragraph 2)

2007

Except in a hazard, if a player has reason to believe a ball is his, he may lift the ball without penalty to identify it.

2008

If a player has reason to believe a ball at rest is his and it is necessary to lift the ball in order to identify it, he may lift the ball, without penalty, in order to do so.

Rule 15-3b – Wrong Ball; Stroke Play

2007

If a player makes a *stroke* at a *wrong ball* that is not in a hazard, he incurs a penalty of two strokes.

2008

If a player makes a *stroke* at a *wrong ball*, he incurs a penalty of two strokes.

Exception: There is no penalty if a competitor makes a *stroke* at a *wrong ball* that is moving in water in a water hazard. Any *strokes* made at a *wrong ball* moving in water in a *water hazard* do not count in the competitor's score.

Terminology Change: From Reasonable Evidence to Virtually Certain (Rule 26-1)

2007

It is a question of fact whether a ball lost after having been struck toward a *water hazard* is lost in the *hazard*. In order to treat the ball as lost in the *hazard*, there must be reasonable evidence that the ball lodged in it. In the absence of such evidence, the ball must be treated as a *lost ball* and Rule 27 applies.

2008

It is a question of fact whether a ball that has not been found after having been struck toward a *water hazard* is in the hazard. In order to apply this Rule, it must be known or virtually certain that the ball is in the *hazard*. In the absence of such knowledge or certainty, the player must proceed under Rule 27-1.

Updated Decision: 26-1/1 Meaning of "Known or Virtually Certain"

If a ball has been struck towards a water hazard and has not been found, the term "known or virtually certain" indicates the level of confidence that the ball is in the water hazard that is required for the player to proceed under Rule 26-1. A player may not assume that his ball is in a water hazard simply because there is a possibility that the ball may be in the hazard. If it is not known that the ball is in the water hazard, in order for the player to proceed under Rule 26-1 there must be almost no doubt that the ball is in the hazard. Otherwise, a ball that cannot be found must be considered lost outside the hazard and the player must proceed under Rule 27-1.

All available evidence must be taken into account in determining whether knowledge or virtual certainty exists, including any testimony and the physical conditions in the area around the water hazard. For

example, if a water hazard is surrounded by a fairway on which a ball could hardly be lost, there exists a greater certainty that the ball is in the hazard than there would be if there were deep rough in the area. Observing a ball splash in a water hazard would not necessarily provide knowledge or virtual certainty as to the location of the ball as sometimes such a ball may skip out of a hazard. The same principle would apply for a ball that may have been moved by an outside agency (Rule 18-1) or a ball that has not been found and may be in an obstruction (Rule 24-3) or an abnormal ground condition (Rule 25-1c). (Rev 2008)

Disqualification Penalty to Status Penalty (Rules 4-1, 4-2)

2007

PENALTY FOR BREACH OF RULE 4-1 or -2: Disqualification

2008

***PENALTY FOR CARRYING, BUT NOT MAKING STROKE WITH CLUB OR CLUBS IN BREACH OF RULE 4-1 or 4-2:**

Match play — At the conclusion of the hole at which the breach is discovered, the state of the match is adjusted by deducting one hole for each hole at which a breach occurred; maximum deduction per round — Two holes...

Stroke Play – Two strokes for each hole at which any breach occurred; maximum penalty per round – Four Strokes.

General Penalty to One Stroke Penalty (Rule 19-2 Ball in Motion Deflected or Stopped by Player, Partner, Caddie or Equipment)

2007

a. Match Play

If a player's ball is accidentally deflected or stopped by himself, his partner or either of their caddies or equipment, he loses the hole.

b. Stroke Play

If a competitor's ball is accidentally deflected or stopped by himself, his partner or either of their caddies or equipment, the competitor incurs a penalty of two strokes.

2008

If a player's ball is accidentally deflected or stopped by himself, his partner or either of their caddies or equipment, the player incurs a penalty of one stroke. The ball must be played as it lies.

General Penalty to No Penalty (Rule 24-1 Movable Obstructions)

2007

... When a ball is in motion, an *obstruction* that might influence the movement of the ball, other than an attended flagstick or equipment of the players, must not be removed.

2008

... When a ball is in motion, an *obstruction* that might influence the movement of the ball, other than equipment of any player or the flagstick when attended, removed or held up, must not be moved.

Revised Decision 17-1/7: Removed Flagstick Placed on Ground Subsequently Lifted

Q. A, the opponent or fellow competitor of B, removes the flagstick from the hole and places it on the ground. B putts and A, who is standing within reach of the removed flagstick, realizes that B's ball might strike the removed flagstick, so he picks the flagstick up. What is the ruling?

A. There is no penalty – see Rule 24-1.

CLARITY: Lost Ball Definition

2007

A ball is deemed "lost" if:

- a. It is not found, or identified as his by the player, within five minutes after the player's *side* or his or their *caddies* have begun to search for it; or
- b. The player has made a *stroke* at a *substituted ball*.

- c. The player has made a *stroke* at a *provisional ball* from the place where the original ball is likely to be or from a point nearer the *hole* than that place (see Rule 27-2b);

2008

A ball is deemed “lost” if:

- a. It is not found, or identified as his by the player, within five minutes after the player’s *side* or his or their *caddies* have begun to search for it; or
- b. The player has made a *stroke* at a *provisional ball* from the place where the original ball is likely to be or from a point nearer the *hole* than that place (see Rule 27-2b); or
- c. The player has put another ball into play under penalty of stroke and distance (see Rule 27-1a); or
- d. The player has put another ball into play because it is known or virtually certain that the ball, which has not been found, has been *moved* by an *outside agency* (see Rule 18-1), is in **an obstruction** (see Rule 24-3), is in an *abnormal ground condition* (see Rule 25-1c) or is in a *water hazard* (see Rule 26-1); or
- e. The player has made a *stroke* at a *substituted ball*.

CLARITY: Sections added to Rule 27-1

2007

Rule 27-1 Ball Lost or Out of Bounds

2008

Rule 27-1a Stroke and Distance

Rule 27-1b Ball Out of Bounds

Rule 27-1c Ball Not Found Within Five Minutes

27-1a – Proceeding Under Stroke and Distance

At any time, a player may, under penalty of one stroke, play a ball as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was last played (see Rule 20-5), i.e., proceed under penalty of stroke and distance.

Except as otherwise provided in the Rules, if a player makes a *stroke* at a ball from the spot at which the original ball was last played, he is deemed to have proceeded under penalty of stroke and distance.

27-1b – Ball Out of Bounds

If a ball is *out of bounds*, the player must play a ball, under penalty of one stroke, as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was last played (see Rule 20-5).

27-1c – Ball Not Found Within Five Minutes

If a ball is *lost* as a result of not being found, or identified as his by the player, within five minutes after the player’s *side* or his or their *caddies* have begun to search for it, the player must play a ball, under penalty of one stroke, as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was last played (see Rule 20-5).

CLARITY: Revised Decision 13-4/0.5

Q. What is meant by “test the condition of the hazard” in Rule 13-4a?

A. The term covers all actions by which the player could gain more information about the hazard than could be gained from taking his stance for the stroke to be made, bearing in mind that a certain amount of digging in with the feet in the sand or soil is permitted when taking the stance for a stroke. Examples of actions that would not constitute testing the condition of the hazard include the following:

- digging in with the feet for a stance, including for a practice swing, anywhere in the hazard or in a similar hazard;
- placing an object, such as clubs or a rake, in the hazard;

- leaning on an object (other than a club) such as a rake while it is touching the ground in the hazard or water in a water hazard;
- touching the hazard with an object (other than a club) such as a towel (touching with a club would be a breach of Rule 13-4b); or
- marking the position of the ball with a tee or otherwise when proceeding under a Rule.

Examples of actions that would constitute testing the condition of the hazard in breach of Rule 13-4a include the following:

- digging in with the feet in excess of what would be done for a stance for a stroke or a practice swing;
- filling in footprints from a previous stance (e.g., when changing stance to make a different type of stroke);
- intentionally sticking an object, **such as a rake, into sand or soil in the hazard or water in a water hazard (but see Rule 12-1);**
- smoothing a bunker with a rake, a club or otherwise (but see Exception 2 to Rule 13-4);
- kicking the ground in the hazard or water in a water hazard; or
- touching the sand with a club when making a practice swing in the hazard or in a similar hazard (but see Exception 3 to Rule 13- 4).

Terminology Changes

- “Hole-by-hole” play-off (replaces “sudden death”)
- “Drop Zone” (replaces “ball drop”)