



# tee time

May 2017

NEWSLETTER OF THE WELLINGTON GOLF REFEREES ASSOCIATION INC.

## Proposed Major Rules Changes



The big story since the last Tee Time has been the USGA and R&A announcement on 1 March of the biggest re-write of golf rules ever. David Rickman of the R&A, said, "Our aim is to make the Rules easier to understand and to apply for all golfers. We have looked at every Rule to try to find ways to make them more intuitive and straightforward and we believe we have identified many significant improvements."

### Proposed new Rules of Golf to take effect from 1 January 2019

The following is from the R&A website:

The proposed 24 new Rules, reduced from the current 34, have been written in a user-friendly style. The initiative also focuses on assessing the overall consistency, simplicity and fairness of the Rules for play. When adopted, the Rules will be supported by technology that allows the use of images, videos and graphics.

## Highlights of the proposed Rule changes

- Elimination or reduction of "ball moved" penalties: There will be no penalty for accidentally moving a ball on the putting green or in searching for a ball; and a player is not responsible for causing a ball to move unless it is "virtually certain" that he or she did so.
- Relaxed putting green rules: There will be no penalty if a ball played from the putting green hits an unattended flagstick in the hole; players may putt without having the flagstick attended or removed. Players may repair spike marks and other damage made by shoes, animal damage and other damage on the putting green and there is no penalty for merely touching the line of putt.
- Relaxed rules for "penalty areas" (currently called "water hazards"): Red and yellow-marked penalty areas may cover areas of desert, jungle, lava rock, etc., in addition to areas of water; expanded use of red penalty areas where lateral relief is allowed; and there will be no penalty for moving loose impediments or touching the ground or water in a penalty area.
- Relaxed bunker rules: There will be no penalty for moving loose impediments in a bunker or for generally touching the sand with a

hand or club. A limited set of restrictions (such as not grounding the club right next to the ball) is kept to preserve the challenge of playing from the sand; however, an extra relief option is added for an unplayable ball in a bunker, allowing the ball to be played from outside the bunker with a two-stroke penalty.

- **Relying on player integrity:** A player's "reasonable judgment" when estimating or measuring a spot, point, line, area or distance will be upheld, even if video evidence later shows it to be wrong; and elimination of announcement procedures when lifting a ball to identify it or to see if it is damaged.
- **Pace-of-play support:** Reduced time for searching for a lost ball (from five minutes to three); affirmative encouragement of "ready golf" in stroke play; recommending that players take no more than 40 seconds to play a stroke and other changes intended to help with pace of play.
- **Simplified way of taking relief:** A new procedure for taking relief by dropping a ball in and playing it from a specific relief area; relaxed procedures for dropping a ball, allowing the ball to be dropped from just above the ground or any growing thing or other object on the ground.

The full draft of the proposed rules can be seen at this link:

<http://www.usga.org/content/dam/usga/pdf/2017/rules-modernization/rules-and-definitions-2019.pdf> Also see this R&A site: <http://www.rules.golf/>

The R&A and USGA are seeking feedback from golfers on the changes by 31 August this year. The final approved new Rules will be ready by mid-2018.



The WGRA is already planning how it will manage the introduction of the new rules and is expecting to be guided in this by the R&A through NZ Golf. Once the WGRA is up to speed, we anticipate providing training to all Wellington club members in the later half of 2018. In the meantime, the WGRA is reviewing the changes to determine whether Association feedback is warranted.

## More Rules Controversies

You will recall the Dustin Johnson and Anna Nordqvist rules incidents from last year, which proved PR disasters for the rules governing bodies, the USGA and R&A. The trend of controversies – followed by reaction by the rules governing bodies - has continued this year.

Firstly, Lexi Thompson, tournament leader



at the time, was penalised 4 strokes for playing from the wrong place when a TV viewer reported that she had failed to replace her ball

properly during the third round of the ANA Inspiration major tournament in early April.

Again, the internet erupted in criticism, this time mainly targeting the practice of allowing viewers to phone in perceived breaches. In this case, the phone call came the day after the breach, so Lexi was penalised two strokes for signing an incorrect scorecard as well as two for playing from a wrong place.

And just as the fallout from the Dustin Johnson incident at the US Open prompted a rule change from January this year (a local rule that accidental moving of the ball on the green is no longer penalisable), the USGA and R&A again acted quickly. A new Decision (34-3/10) was issued, which emphasises the role of the player's integrity (as per the proposed 2019 changes), and limits the use of video evidence in two ways:

- 1. If an infraction can't be seen with the naked eye, there's no penalty, even if video shows otherwise.*
- 2. If a tournament committee determines that a player does "all that can be reasonably expected to make an accurate estimation or measurement" in determining a line or position to play from or to spot a ball, then there will be no penalty even if video replay later shows that to be wrong.*

There is more information on the new Decision at this link:

<http://www.usga.org/rules-hub/decision-34-3-10--limitations-on-use-of-video-evidence.html>

Interestingly, the Decision probably wouldn't have changed the outcome in Lexi's case, but could well have in Anna Nordqvist's (she was penalised for moving a few grains of sand in a bunker).

Although Lexi was plainly very upset by the ruling that ended up costing her the tournament, it is hard to feel sorry for her. She clearly replaced her ball incorrectly, and under the previous iteration of the Rules of Golf would have been disqualified for the incorrect scorecard, not just given an additional two stroke penalty. It's surely not that difficult to replace your ball correctly, and she is, after all, a professional.

The second controversy in April was the slow play penalty handed out to a pair of lowly ranked players at the Zurich Classic of New Orleans. That tournament reintroduced team play to the 'ordinary' PGA tour calendar. Without going into detail, essentially both players were put on the clock and later assessed a one stroke team penalty after exceeding the Tour's '40 seconds to play' guideline. The penalty was criticised as unfair and a demonstration of the sheer arbitrariness of application. No player had been penalised on the PGA Tour for 22 years, despite slow play being a constant issue. Worse, it seems only 'no-name' players get pinged. Jason Day has proverbially given the fingers to officials saying if he needs to back off five times before feeling comfortable enough to hit the shot, he will do so.

Slow play is a curse of the modern game (remember the 79 and 81 year-olds who completed their 18 holes at the US Masters in 1964 in two hours 33 minutes? Nowadays, five hours is more common).

Governing bodies need to have the courage of their convictions and enforce their policies without fear or favour, or they will indeed look ridiculous. On the positive side,

many of the changes coming in 2019 should have the desired effect of speeding up play.

## Recent Rules Incident

### Aeration Holes

An interesting situation arose recently in a



Duncan Cup round at Miramar Golf Club. Aeration had been undertaken

around, but not on, several greens; however, on the 11<sup>th</sup> aeration holes encroached onto the green. One team member found his ball settled in an aeration hole on the green and informed his opponent that he was going to move the ball out of the hole, and did so while the opponent was seeking a ruling. The opponent then informed the referee that 'the issue was resolved'.

Decision 25/15 states that aeration holes are not holes made by a greenkeeper in accordance with the definition of GUR. Therefore, there is no automatic right of relief from an Abnormal Ground Condition unless the Club has adopted a local rule allowing relief.

In the Miramar case, there was no relevant local rule in effect. The opponent could have claimed the hole under Rule 18-2 but chose to ignore the breach.

### Addendum

Hopefully you received my correction to the Rule 18 change paragraph in the February

issue of 'Tee Time', but just in case, the story should have read as follows:

### 2017 RULE 18/20 CHANGE

You will by now no doubt be aware of the change to Rules 18 and 20 that came into effect on 1 January this year. Clearly the change came about as a result of the furore that erupted following the Dustin Johnson incident at last year's US Open. Because the change was evidently considered urgent, it has been issued as a Local Rule for adoption by individual clubs or tournament committees rather than waiting for the next iteration of the Rules of Golf, due in 2019.

The change applies to accidental moving of the ball on the green. The local rule recommended wording is as follows:

*"Rules [18-2](#), [18-3](#) and [20-1](#) are modified as follows:*

*When a player's ball lies on the putting green, there is no penalty if the ball or ball-marker is accidentally moved by the player, his partner, his opponent, or any of their caddies or equipment.*

*The moved ball or ball-marker must be replaced as provided in Rules 18-2, 18-3 and 20-1.*

*This Local Rule applies only when the player's ball or ball-marker lies on the putting green and any movement is accidental.*

*Note: If it is determined that a player's ball on the putting green was moved as a result of wind, water or some other natural cause such as the effects of gravity, the ball must be played as it lies from its new location. A ball-marker moved in such circumstances is replaced."*

## Rules Incidents

We're always interested in sharing interesting Rules incidents in 'Tee Time'. Please send any interesting rulings that you might become aware of to Terry Gardiner: [gardfam77@gmail.com](mailto:gardfam77@gmail.com)

Terry Gardiner – 232 3130  
[gardfam77@gmail.com](mailto:gardfam77@gmail.com)

Kathy Goodman  
[kathygoodman58@gmail.com](mailto:kathygoodman58@gmail.com)

Aine McCoy  
[admeek@xtra.co.nz](mailto:admeek@xtra.co.nz)

Lachlan Thurston  
[lachlan@wlg.aero](mailto:lachlan@wlg.aero)

**WGI Rep**  
Steve Weir  
[office@wgi.co.nz](mailto:office@wgi.co.nz)

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Michael Phelan  
Treasurer – WGRA  
23 Rimu Road  
Kelburn  
Wellington 6012

## WGRA Executive 2017

### President

Bill Stratford – 528 5080  
[bill.raynor@clear.net.nz](mailto:bill.raynor@clear.net.nz)

### Vice-President

Brian Richmond  
[yorichmo@paradise.net.nz](mailto:yorichmo@paradise.net.nz)

### Secretary/Treasurer

Michael Phelan  
[pheelo.mnp@gmail.com](mailto:pheelo.mnp@gmail.com)

### Committee

Bryan Futter – (04) 293 2146  
[bryan.futter@icloud.com](mailto:bryan.futter@icloud.com)