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Subject: Proposed Changes for Rules of Golf
 Priority: Normal Date: Thursday, August 3, 2017 3:15 PM Size: 53 KB

Dear MGA Rules Committee Members,

I truly applaud the effort given to solicit feedback from MGA members regarding proposed USGA/R&A rules changes for 2018. Hopefully we have accumulated a lot of thoughtful responses.

Below are my comments on the proposed rules changes. I have previously provided many of these comments but repeat them here with references to rules, some amplification in a few places, and with added conclusions so that they are all in one document. The first 21 comments correspond to the 21 items that have been tested by the MGA. Additional comments are also offered for other proposed rules changes that the MGA group has not yet tested.

Note that the USGA web site has several incorrect references to the rules, at least as they are currently written. It's possible that a complete renumbering of the rules may be planned, in which case their references may indicate the new numbering. For tracking purposes I have tried to provide a reference to current rules.

- 1 **Ball Moved During Search (incorrectly references new Rule 7.4; should reference Rule 12.1 and 18.2):** In principle, I believe USGA has some rational reason for proposing this change. It does indeed seem inconsistent to encourage everyone but the player or his caddie to look for a ball when the player may be penalized for moving the ball whereas others are not penalized for accidentally moving the ball. But I also think the proposed change will be problematic in that "accidentally" is not defined. I can foresee a rush of "Decisions" ensuing to help define "accidental" and expounding on what constitutes due care and diligence to not have an accident. Conclusion: Do not adopt this change until further refined to define "accidentally".
- 2 **When to Replace a Ball That Moves on a Putting Green (incorrectly references new Rule 13.1c; should reference Rule 18.1):** This proposed change seems to make some sense in that it can eliminate confusion about the proper place to play the putt, either where it was marked or from the place where it moved. The lifting and replacing removes the connection with the previous stroke, so replacing it where it was marked seems appropriate. It makes clear that if it moves before marking/replacing that the ball must be played as it lies from its new location. But . . . I believe that we need to be careful to insure that the MGA players understand that this proposed change is different than the "No Penalty For Moving Ball on the Putting Green". In that other proposed change it would be difficult to define what is accidental and what is not. Conclusion: Adopt the proposed change.
- 3 **Repairing Damage on the Putting Green (incorrectly references new Rule 13.1b(1); should reference Rule 16.1c):** This seems to be one of the more practical proposed rules changes. I believe most golfers don't really know what is repairable and what is not repairable under the present rules. Spike marks, shoe damage, indentations from clubs or flagstick, animal damage, etc, are not currently

what happens if the
ball ricochets and
hits another ball?
(~~Penalty~~ vs
No Penalty)

- repairable. I agree with the USGA rationale for making this change – i.e., that we generally expect to have a smooth surface for rolling the ball toward the hole. This proposed change would serve to clear up what can be repaired. Conclusion: Adopt the proposed change.
- 4 **Ball Played from the Putting Green Hits Unattended Flagstick in Hole (incorrectly references new Rule 13.2b(3); should reference Rule 17.1):** This proposed change is one that I hope USGA adopts. It should speed up play and I think it can be done without altering the probability that the ball would go in the hole or bounce away. For our MGA members it will be important to emphasize that it applies only to unattended flagsticks. Conclusion: Adopt the proposed change.
- 5 **Unplayable Ball in a Bunker (incorrectly references new Rule 19.3(b); should reference Rule 28):** Whew! This one could have interesting developments. Only the player can determine what is playable or not playable, so there is no ambiguity about when such a drop could be made. They can already drop in the bunker with no penalty when a ball lies within water in the bunker, so there is at least some foundation for moving a ball. Two penalty strokes for a back-on-a-line drop seems fair. I won't be totally surprised if the USGA adopts this proposed change since it would take some of the frustrations out of the game, but I won't hold my breath for them to change either. Conclusion: Adopt the proposed change.
- 6 **Ball in Motion Accidentally Deflected (incorrectly references new Rule 11.1; should reference Rule 19.2):** This proposed change would open Pandora's Box and result more more cheating than anyone can imagine. "Oh, I just put up my hand to protect myself when it rebounded toward me and it accidentally bounced out of the bunker." I firmly believe that a player should be responsible for assessing the risk of an accidental deflection and play accordingly. The Rules of Golf and Decisions already provide adequate guidance for handling a deflected ball. We should not open the gates for cheating. Conclusion: Do not adopt this change.
- 7 **Use of Clubs Damaged During Round (incorrectly references new Rule 4.1; should reference Rule 4.3):** Why in the world would we want to give any benefit to a player who deliberately damages a club? The problem is even more complex in that a player could deliberately alter a club to adjust its performance in the round. I would not like to see this proposed change adopted. Conclusion: Do not adopt this change.
- 8 **Standard for Deciding Why a Ball Moved (incorrectly references new Rule 9.2; should reference Rule 18.2):** The proposed change would adopt the "known or virtually certain" standard for questions of fact about why a ball at rest moved. The current rule applies "weight of evidence" test, an approach that is often difficult to apply and produces a lot of close calls. Conclusion: Adopt the proposed change.
- 9 **Moving of Touching Loose Impediments or Touching Sand in a Bunker (incorrectly references new Rules 12.2a and 12.2b; should reference rule 23.1):** This proposed change is unnecessary and can only lead to players taking unnecessary time to clean up the area around their ball. In addition, it will create situations where there is ambiguity between what is fairly removing an impediment and "testing" the sand. This is a bad proposed change. Conclusion: Do not adopt this change.
- 10 **New Procedure for Dropping a Ball (incorrectly references new Rule 14.3; should reference Rule 20.2):** The USGA web site describing proposed rules changes references Rule 14.3, "Artificial Devices and Unusual Equipment; Abnormal Uses of Equipment" which has nothing to do with dropping a ball. The correct reference is Rule 20.2, "Dropping and Re-Dropping". The discussion on reasons for change is poorly written and does not provide justification for the proposed change. It describes the current approach as "mechanical" which is only a bias term. It states that the current rule has several procedural requirements but fails to recognize that an equal number of similar procedural requirements would still apply to the proposed rule change. The proposed change would allow the ball to be dropped from any height, as long as it is above the ground or any growing thing or artificial object. This will no doubt prove problematic for fellow competitors to observe. From much distance, it could prove very difficult to ascertain whether the player dropped or placed the ball. If the USGA/R&A wants to change the rule they should require only that the player stand erect. That would allow the player to directly drop or even toss the ball and it would be easily observable by fellow competitors. Conclusion: Do not adopt this change as written.
- 11 **Time for Search Before Ball is Lost (incorrectly references new Rule 18.2; should reference Section II "Definitions"):** The proposed change reduces the time for a ball search from 5 minutes to 3 minutes. Why not try to speed up the game and reduce the frustration of groups playing behind the lost ball group? Conclusion: Adopt the proposed change.
- 12 **Substitution of a Ball Always Allowed When Taking Relief (incorrectly references new Rule 14.3; should reference Rule 15.1):** The current rules are at least a little confusing about when a player can substitute a ball. This proposed change affords a consistent approach for substituting a ball. Conclusion: Adopt the proposed change.
- 13 **Relief for an Embedded Ball (incorrectly references new Rule 16.3; should reference Rule 25.2):** This proposed change is not needed, invites more chances for players to cheat, and creates a definition problem. Specifically, the current rule already allows local rules to apply "embedded ball" through the green when and where needed. By making "general area" the default situation it creates a problem for balls in the rough

where it is often very difficult to tell whether part of the ball is below the ground. The proposed change also does not apply embedded ball to sand areas, a matter that leaves a definition problem. Many course have "sandy" areas where it is impossible to say whether it is "sand" or just regular ground with a little bit of sand on the surface. What standard should be applied? Further, many courses have coquina waste areas which look like and may even respond similar to sand. It could prove difficult to even tell the difference between coquina and sand. What then? Conclusion: Do not adopt this change.

14 **Caddie Lifting Ball on the Putting Green (incorrectly references new Rule 14.1; should reference Rule 16.1b):** This proposed rule change is not needed. It would allow a caddie to mark and lift a ball and subsequently allow the player to replace the ball, perhaps in a different way or place. It is not evident that the proposed change would save any time or provide any real benefit to the game. Conclusion: Do not adopt this change.

15 **Elimination of the Requirement to Announce the Player's Intent to Lift a Ball (incorrectly references new Rules 4.2b, 7.3 and 16.4; should reference Rules 5.3, 12.2, 22.2, 24.1, 24.2b, and 25.1b):** Golf is generally regarded as a game to be played with integrity. The surest way to undermine that is to remove checks that allow a golfer to commit even the tiniest of cheats. Announcing intention to lift a ball and doing so under observation is not cumbersome or time consuming and serves well to "protect the field". This proposed change has no benefit and opens the door to cheating. Conclusion: Do not adopt this change.

16 **Time for Search Before Ball is Lost (new Rule 18.2):** Note that this item on the MGA list duplicates but amplifies item 11. The amplification for MGA allows a search to begin and subsequently play a provisional ball within three minutes. Conclusion: See item 11.

17 **Holes Created by Animals (no proposed general rule change):** The USGA/R&A proposed rule changes includes allowing repair of almost any damage on the green but does not extend to other areas of the course. The current rules already include relief from "abnormal ground conditions". The rule change proposed by USGA/R&A applying to greens makes sense and would allow players to try to have a smooth surface for rolling the ball. Conclusion: Adopt the proposed change that applies to greens but limit it to greens.

18 **Time for Search Before Ball is Lost (new Rule 18.2):** Note that this item on the MGA list duplicates items 11 and 16. The amplification for MGA allows a search to begin and subsequently play a provisional ball within three minutes. Conclusion: See item 11.

19 **Touching or Moving Loose Impediments or Touching the Ground in a Penalty Area (incorrectly references new Rule 17; should reference Rule 13.4):** Oh boy, will this proposed change open the door for cheating. I completely disagree with the Reason for Change put forth on the USGA web site that says the prohibition on touching or moving loose impediments or touching the ground in a hazard has never been practical. Hogwash! The current rule is clear as a bell now. If it is man-made you can touch or remove it; if it is natural you can not touch or remove it. Conclusion: Do not adopt this change.

20 **Measuring the Size of the Relief Area Where a Ball Must be Dropped and Played (incorrectly references new Rule 14.3; should reference Rule 20.2):** The stated reason for change is that the current procedure potentially allows players to obtain more relief than necessary. The discussion specifically calls out allowing the ball to roll up to two club-lengths from where it hits the ground. The proposed rule specifies 20 inches or 80 inches from a reference point or reference line. It is impractical to expect players to carry a measuring stick with those two distances marked, and marking a club at 20 inches could alter the playing characteristics of the club depending on how it is marked. No clubs are suitable for marking 80 inches, and marking 20 inches four times is impractical. If the objective of the proposed change is to further limit the area for relief then changing the two club-length roll to one club length should suffice. Conclusion: Do not adopt this change.

21 **Touching the Line of Play on a Putting Green (incorrectly references new Rule 8.1a and 8.1b; should reference Rule 8.2b and 16.1a):** The proposed change makes sense by allowing the player or caddie to touch the surface of the putting green as long as it doesn't improve the line of play.

There are other proposed rule changes for which our MGA will probably want to provide feedback:

✓ **Use of Distance-Measuring Devices (incorrectly references Rule 4.3; should reference Rule 14.3):** The proposed rule change reverses the default position that prohibits distance measuring devices unless adopted as a Local Rule. The ubiquitous GPS and laser rangefinder devices are so commonplace now that I'm sure golfers assume that they are normally allowed. Why not adopt the proposed change? Conclusion: Adopt the proposed change.

? **Where a Dropped Ball Must Come to Rest (incorrectly references Rule 14.3; should reference Rule 20-2):** This proposed rule change is tied very closely to the "New Procedure for Dropping a Ball" that would allow a player to drop the ball from any height.

The proposed change about where it comes to rest might indeed eliminate confusion about how far the ball may be allowed to roll after it hits the ground but it also requires that the ball must be redropped a potentially endless number of times until it comes to rest in the defined area. In my humble opinion the companion change that would allow the ball to be dropped from any height will invite a lot of cheating, and the unlimited nature of redrops just doesn't make any sense since there are areas on most golf courses where the ball will roll out of a defined area no matter what height it is dropped from. So both of those proposed changes are bad ideas. Conclusion: Do not adopt either change.

✓ **Expanded Use of Red-Marked Penalty Areas (incorrectly references Rule 17; should reference Rule 26):** This proposed change makes a lot of sense and, in fact, it already in use on a large percentage of golf courses to keep people out of areas that are dangerous or to discourage them from wasting time looking for balls that are unlikely to be found. Conclusion: Adopt the proposed change.

? **No Penalty for Moving a Ball on the Putting Green (new Rule 13.1):** The discussion and video on the USGA web site are not consistent. The discussion aptly recognizes that it is often difficult to tell whether a player caused a ball to move or it was caused by outside agency. The current rule also prescribes several exceptions where no penalty is applied for accidentally moving the ball. But the video illustrates some situations that involve nothing but carelessness on the part of the player - e.g., kicking the ball, striking it with a club, etc. How should a line be drawn between true accident and an "accident on purpose"? The current rule is more than adequate while the proposed rule change just opens the door for cheating or, as a minimum, absolves carelessness. Conclusion: Do not adopt this change.

? **Replacing Ball When Original Spot is Not Known (incorrectly references rule 14.2c; should reference Rule 18):** The reasons for change detailed on the USGA web site are not entirely correct. A ball moved by an outside agency or by a fellow competitor is replaced, not dropped. There is no apparent reason to change this rule provision. Conclusion: Do not adopt this change.

✓ **Areas the Committee May Mark as Penalty Areas (new Rule 17; should be incorporated in Section II, "Definitions"):** Many golf courses already mark areas that do not contain water as hazards, or "penalty area" as it would be defined in the new definition. It makes sense to restrict areas that are potentially hazardous to players - e.g., snake infested brush, rock fields, etc. Conclusion: Adopt the proposed change.

✓ **Adding Clubs to Replace a Club Damaged During Round (new Rule 4.1):** This proposed change would allow a player to purposefully damage his club, rendering it non-conforming, yet continue to use it for play in the round. This obviates the purpose of Rule 4.3 and yields potentially unfair advantage to the player who purposefully alters a club. Conclusion: Do not adopt this change.

✓ **Caddie Standing Behind a Player to Help Line the Player Up (incorrectly references new Rule 10.2b(3); should reference Rule 14.2):** The current rule allows a caddie or partner to position close to or on a line of play or putt behind the ball until just before a stroke is made. This undermines the principle that it should be the player's ability to properly align. The proposed change requires the caddie or partner to move away from such position once the player begins taking a stance for the stroke. Conclusion: Adopt the proposed change.

Respectfully,

JD

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