The revised Rules of Golf will go into effect on January 1. While the revisions are welcome and will benefit all who play the game, unless you a serious “student” of the Rules, the format in which they were presented appears disjointed and confusing. We believe it is important that every player have a certain level of understanding of the Rules to more thoroughly enjoy the game and for scoring/handicap purposes. Accordingly, we will attempt to present everything the casual player needs to know about the Rules, using this narrative. We trust you will find it informative.

Please excuse us while we take a second to tend to some details. The Rules of Golf are the creation of the United States Golf Association © (“USGA”) in conjunction with the R & A, its European counterpart. The name, “United States Golf Association ©”, and the Rules of Golf © are both subject to copyrights and all such rights are reserved in them. The Oklahoma Golf Association (“OGA”), as an Allied Golf Association, has a limited license to use the name in providing instruction to golfers in Oklahoma. That is the objective of this narrative. And, since we are writing about matters as to which the USGA retains an interest, we will state that the opinions which are expressed are those of the OGA and not, necessarily, those of the USGA.

We encourage everyone to keep a copy of the Rules handy (in your golf bag), for quick reference. The Rules of Golf © remain the absolute authority; you should only use this narrative to help explain how they all work together.
Introduction

Terms and phrases which have a special meaning will be explained in the discussion of the Rule in which they are applicable. Words which make up the new vocabulary will be duly noted. Being able to speak the language will be helpful. In that respect, using rainy days to peruse the Definitions is highly recommended.

In the old Rules there is the requirement in many situations to put “the” ball (the original ball), back into play. Substitution for “the” ball was not permitted and a penalty ensued if a substitution was made. Under the revised Rules;

(A). when a lifted or moved ball is to be replaced, the same ball must be set down on the original spot; and,

(B). when taking free relief or penalty relief, a substituted ball or the original ball may be dropped in the relief area.

To save time, when we are talking about procedure “B”, we will not repeat that phrase but simply use, “a ball” to indicate that the player may put the original ball, or a substitute ball, into play every time relief is taken.

You will be introduced to a new procedure for taking relief. Previously, there was the requirement in taking relief to establish the “nearest point”. In the new Rules the player determines the Reference Point and then measures a “Relief Area” which is a space defined by club lengths into which the player will drop a ball back into play. This is important; the dropped ball must land in, and come to rest in, the Relief Area. If the ball rolls out of the Relief Area the player must drop a ball again. If the ball rolls out of the Relief Area after the second drop, a ball must be placed at the spot where it first touched the ground on the second drop. Two other changes in taking relief; “Dropping” the ball has changed; instead of dropping from shoulder height, a player must let go of the ball from knee level. Also, in measuring “club lengths” the player may use the longest club of the 14 clubs he has, other than a putter.

In respect to pace of play, the concept of “Ready Golf” has been adopted and each player is encouraged to make a stroke within 40 seconds.

The term “General Penalty” will be used throughout the narrative. That means that in match play a breach results in the immediate loss of that hole. So after a violation, the players will proceed to the next tee. And, in stroke play, that violation results in two (2) penalty strokes which are added to the player’s score for that hole.

A ball which is to be dropped must be dropped by the player himself. A ball to be placed or replaced may be done by the player, his partner or the person who moved it.
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Rule 1. Fundamentals of the Game

This statement of the fundamentals of the game and the player's conduct is more a wish list rather than a Rule. We start with the basic tenet, “Play the course as you find it and play your ball as it lies”.

In navigating the course you should play by the Rules, apply each penalty you incur, be respectful of others and help maintain the course by raking bunkers, replacing divots, repairing ball marks, etc.

When a Rule requires an estimate or measurement of a spot, line or distance do what is reasonably expected under the circumstances. We realize you can't always be precise, but if you have done the best you can it will be accepted even if it is later shown that you were not that accurate.

In regard to the Rules, if you knowingly breach a Rule and refuse to include the penalty, you will be Disqualified (“DQ”). Likewise, if you and another player agree to ignore a Rule or waive a penalty, you will both be DQ.

The ruling body of every event is the all-powerful “Committee”. It creates the Local Rules which are on the same level with the Rules of Golf. It can enact as a Local Rule a “Code of Conduct” and enforce any applicable sanctions against misconduct, including DQ when appropriate. The Committee can also waive a DQ penalty when it is warranted.

Golf is a game but it is also a source of challenges and elation when we do well. We all need to honor the spirit and tradition that comes with it; staunch self imposition of a penalty being one of them.
Rule 2. The Course, Defined

There are defined areas on each course and they are significant from a Rules standpoint in that different locations result in different sanctions. Where your ball comes to rest is important. It is also essential that you are familiar with and use the new vocabulary. The golf course includes:
- General Area;
- Teeing area;
- Bunkers;
- Penalty Areas; and,
- Putting Green.

The General Area (“GA”) is all parts of the course except for the other four defined areas. It is the fairways and roughs. It is where you will, generally, play most of your strokes.

The Penalty Area (“PA”) not only includes lakes, ponds, and streams, etc., whether or not containing water, the Committee is also authorized to mark other areas (desert, extreme rough) as a PA. Since the definition has been expanded, the old terms “hazard” and “water hazards” are obsolete and will no longer be used. As the name implies, you will want to avoid PA’s.

You are familiar with tees, bunkers and the green and we will spend more time discussing them in subsequent sections.

Playing in the GA will also bring you into contact with Loose Impediments, immovable obstructions and abnormal ground conditions, which will all be discussed later.

The Committee may also designate areas in which play is prohibited and they are “No Play Zones”. If necessary they may even prohibit entry into these locations for any purpose. Be mindful of any such restrictions. All such locations will be marked and also described in the Local Rules and this is another reason you will want to carefully read that all-important document.
Rule 3. Competition Formats and Scoring

There are two forms of play: (1) Match Play; and, (2) Stroke Play. While many Rules pertain to both formats, there are some differences in respect to sanctions and you will need to be aware of those.

Match Play is a format in which one player competes against an opponent on a hole-by-hole basis. The player with the low score wins the hole. The winner of the match is the player who is up more holes than remain to play. If Andy is up three holes in his match with Barry when they arrive at the 17th tee, the match is over. Andy has won and the result would be announced as “3 and 2”. An opponent may also concede a match. A match may also be contested with one “side”, the player and his partner, against the other side, two opponents. In a handicap event it is incumbent for the opponents to know the holes at which strokes will be given/received and the net score will count on each hole. In a match an opponent can concede the opponent’s next stroke, a hole or the match. A concession should be clearly stated so there is no confusion. Note this says “next stroke” so don’t agree to give all putts in the leather.

During play of a hole or after, an opponent may ask a player for the number of strokes the player has taken on the hole and the player incurs the General Penalty for responding with the wrong information, unless it is corrected before the opponent plays. When a player incurs a penalty he must inform his opponent as soon as is reasonably possible and, failing that, the player incurs the General Penalty.

In stroke play the winner is the player who has the fewest total strokes after the completion of all stipulated rounds. In a Handicap event, this means the fewest total net strokes. Each player’s score is kept by his marker on a scorecard. If a player returns a score for a hole which is higher than the actual score, the higher number is accepted. If the player return a score which is lower than the actual number, the player is DQ. The player is responsible to see that the marker records the correct score on each hole and certifies it with a signature. The player must also sign the scorecard and return it to the Committee promptly. Failing that the player is DQ. If the player’s scorecard contains scores for holes which are lower than actual scores because of failure to include penalty stroke which the player did not know about, the player is not DQ and the Committee may revise the scores on the affected holes.

In a later section we will discuss how claims in both formats are made and reserved when an official is not available.
Rule 4 - The Player’s Equipment

This Rule contemplates that the player will use conforming balls and clubs and that information is found in the separate Equipment Rules.

A player may start each round with no more than 14 clubs and may not barrow a club selected by another player. If the club is damaged during the round the player can continue to use it or have it repaired so long as play is not delayed. A damaged club remains a conforming club during the rest of the stipulated round and it must not be replaced. And . . . it doesn’t matter how the player damaged his club including; throwing it, otherwise abusing it, or leaning on it. A damaged club may only be replaced if the damage was the result of an outside influence or someone other than the player.

A player may not deliberately change the playing characteristics of any club during a round, including an adjustment feature or by applying any substance to the face of the club. Using an altered club for a stroke will result in DQ unless the altered club is restored before a stroke is made. If a player loses a club during the round, it may not be replaced.

If a player discovers he is carrying more than 14 clubs, the excess club(s) must be taken out of play. In match play there is a match adjustment penalty by deducting one hole for each hole where the breach occurred with a maximum of two holes. In stroke play there is a penalty of two stroke at each hole where the breach occurred, with a limit of two hole (4 strokes). A player is DQ if he uses a club which has been taken out of play for a stroke during the remainder of the stipulated round.

A player must use a conforming ball for play during a round. If a ball breaks after a stroke, there is no penalty and the stroke must be replayed A ball which is visibly cut or cracked may be replaced and the following procedure must be followed; (1) the player must mark the position of the ball; and, (2) must not clean the ball. If the procedure is not followed the player incurs a penalty of one stroke. It is no longer a requirement that an announcement be made.

In terms of the equipment that may be used, a distance measuring device may be used if it provides only distance information. You should note that the Committee may adopt a Local Rule prohibiting distance measuring devices. A player may not use a glove that give an unfair advantage with hand position or grip. A player is prohibited from using any type of alignment rods or practice swing aids (weighted headcover or “donut”) during a round.

The General Penalty is applied for the first breach of the Rule on equipment usage and DQ for any second breach.
Rule 5 - Playing the Round and Pace of Play

Players are required to start at the time assigned by the Committee and remain in the designated group. The round starts when the player makes a stroke on the first tee. The player must start at the assigned time under penalty of DQ with this exception; when the player arrives at the first hole ready to play within five minutes of the starting time the player receives the General Penalty and proceeds to play. The Committee may waive the DQ when circumstances warrant.

A player in a match may practice on the course before a round or between rounds. In stroke play, on the day of the competition, the players are not permitted to practice on the course before the round but may do so after the round. The penalty for a breach of this section is the general penalty applied to the first hole and a second violation results in DQ. A practice swing with no intent to hit a ball is not a stroke.

Good news . . . the USGA has included Rules which should speed up the pace of play. This rule encourages a player to take no more than 40 seconds to play when it is the player’s turn. A player must not delay play either while playing a hole or between two holes. Penalty for breach of this Rule include: 1st violation - one penalty stroke; 2nd violation – General Penalty; and 3rd violation – DQ. The Committee may include a Pace of Play Policy in the Local Rules and that policy is controlling.

And the concept of “Ready Golf” has been approved. Playing out of turn to help the pace of play is permitted. In match play the opponents may agree which player will play first to save time. In stroke play, and without regard to who is away, when a player can play without distraction and in a safe manner to others, the player may do so.

The Committee may stop play for two reasons; when there is danger all players are required to stop play immediately and not resume until authorized. If play is stopped for other conditions (darkness or unplayable course), the players may continue play of the hole they are on. If the players are between holes they may not proceed. When the signal if given for play to resume, the players must be on position and ready to play and if they are not it is a penalty of DQ. When play is stopped the players may mark and lift their ball and if they elect to leave the ball, they may substitute another ball when play is resumed.
Rule 6 - Playing a Hole

Play of a hole has begun when the player makes a stroke from the tee with the intent to begin play. Play ends in match play when the final putt is made or conceded or when the hole is conceded. In stroke play the hole is concluded when the final putt is made.

The ball must be played from within the teeing ground. In match play there is no penalty but the opponent may ask the player to play again, from the proper tee. This request must be made immediately and if the request is not made, that ball is in play. In stroke play, the player incurs the general penalty and must correct the error by playing from the proper tee. If the error is not corrected before the player tees off on the next hole, the player is DQ. A ball played from outside the tee is not in play and strokes made with it do not count.

The player should hole out with the ball played from the tee, except when a ball is lost or out of bounds, or another ball is substituted, whether permitted or not. When taking relief under a Rule the player may use the original ball or substitute another ball. When playing again from where a previous stroke was made the player may use a ball. When replacing a ball on a spot, the player is not permitted to substitute and must use the original ball.

The player must not make a stroke at a wrong ball. Penalty for playing the wrong ball is the General Penalty. In stroke play, strokes made with a wrong ball do not count. The player is required to correct the mistake before playing from the next tee and, failing that, the player is DQ.

The Rules on order of play have been relaxed to allow “Ready Golf”. In match play the opponents may agree that one will play out of turn. In stroke play and without regard for who is “away”, if a player can play without distraction and causing a danger to others, he may do so. Each player is encouraged to play within 40 seconds after it becomes the player’s turn and he can play without distraction. The OGA endorses the effort to speed up play and we will continue to use our policy which has proven effective. It would be a good idea for each club to adopt its own policy and to see that it is strictly enforced.
Rule 7 – Searching for and Identifying the Ball

A player may take all reasonable measures to find the ball. There is no penalty if the player accidentally moves the ball during the search and the ball must be replaced.

Reasonable efforts include probing sand and moving and bending grass, branches and other growing or attached objects. If the area in which the ball lies is improved during the search there is no penalty unless the improvement resulted from excessive or unnecessary efforts. In other words, if your action is intended to merely find the ball; good. If your action is intended to improve the area where the ball lies to assist in the next stroke, you get the General Penalty.

With the ball in a bunker, the search will include probing and moving sand and if the ball moves the original lie must be re-created. If the player makes the next stroke without having re-created the original lie, the player incurs the General Penalty.

Every player should put his own unique identifying mark on the ball. If the mark on a ball in play is not clearly visible, the ball may be lifted for identification. The player must first mark its position and not clean it more than necessary. If the ball is the player's, it must be replaced. Failing to comply with each of these requirements will result in one penalty stroke. It is no longer necessary to first announce that you are lifting the ball to identify it.
Rule 8 - Play the Course as you Find It.

The most important Rule and the one that will probably be most often breached. A player invokes this Rule with every stroke, everywhere on the course.

The player may not improve any of these protected conditions affecting the stroke:
- the lie of the ball at rest;
- the area of the player’s intended stance;
- the space which is used for the stroke;
- the player’s line of play; and,
- the area in which a ball is dropped or placed in taking relief,

by taking these actions which are not allowed:
- bending or breaking anything growing or fixed;
- altering the surface by creating or eliminating irregularities;
- removing or pressing down divots which have been replaced;
- removing or pressing down sand and loose soil; and,
- removing dew, frost and water.

However, there is no penalty if the conditions are improved by the player in taking one of the actions which are allowed, such as:
- taking reasonable steps to find your ball;
- take reasonable steps to remove loose impediment and movable obstructions;
- fairly taking your stance; and,
- making a backswing for a stroke which is then completed.

If the player has improved the conditions by moving or bending an object there is no penalty if, before making the stroke, the player restores the original condition and any improvement created by the breach is eliminated. Two examples, if you improperly remove a boundary stake you can replace it before the stroke is made and not incur the penalty and you can move a tree limb back into its natural position.

If the lie of the ball is worsened by any person other than the player after the ball has come to rest, the original condition may be restored as nearly as possible and if it cannot be restored the ball may be dropped in a similar place within one club length of the original spot.

A player must not take any actions listed above to affect the stroke of another player or alter any other physical conditions to affect where another player’s ball might go or come to rest. There is no penalty under this Rule if the player alters any of the physical conditions to care for the course, such as smoothing footprints in a bunker or replacing divots in a divot hole.

Penalty for a breach of this Rule is the General Penalty.
Rule 9 - Play the ball as it lies

This Rule applies to a ball at rest and in play on the course and not on the green.

Generally, if a ball at rest is moved by natural forces such as wind, water, gravity or earthquakes, the ball is played as it lies, from the new position. If a ball at rest is moved by any one, or an outside influence, the ball must be replaced at its original spot. A ball is “moved” if it leaves its original spot and comes to rest on any other spot. A ball which is oscillating has not moved.

If it is not known or virtually certain (95%) as to what caused the ball to move, the player should assume that natural forces caused the movement and it is played as it lies, from the new position.

If the player deliberately touches or causes his ball to move he incurs one penalty stroke. If the ball was moved, it must be replaced. There is no penalty if the player moves his ball while: (1). lifting the ball under a Rule; (2). searching for the ball; (3) removing a movable obstruction; and, (4) measuring under a Rule.

In match play, if an opponent deliberately touches or causes the player’s ball to move, the opponent incurs a penalty of one stroke and the ball must be replaced. There is no penalty if the opponent lifted the ball thinking it was his own ball.

In stroke play, if another player or outside influence causes a player’s ball to move there is no penalty and the ball must be replaced.

A ball marker is treated like a ball under this Rule.
Rule 10 - Preparing for and Making the Stroke

A stroke is the forward movement of a club striking at a ball with the head of a club. The fundamental challenge is to direct and control the movement of the entire club by freely swinging the club without anchoring it. The player must not push, scrape or scoop the ball. Should the player strike the ball twice in making the stroke there is no longer a penalty, there is just the one stroke.

The player must not anchor the club by holding the club or a gripping hand against any part of the body except the player may hold the club or gripping hand against a hand or forearm.

The player must not straddle the line of play in making a stroke or stand with one foot on the line of play or an extension of that line.

A player must not make a stroke at a moving ball.

A player must not give advice to anyone in the competition who is playing on the course. A player may not ask for advice except from his caddie. A player may not touch another player’s equipment to obtain information. A player may have the line of play pointed out but any marker must be removed prior to the stroke.

A player must not use a device to assist in taking the stance by aligning his feet or body while making the stroke.

On the putting green, the player or caddie may touch the green with a hand, foot or anything he is holding but it must not improve the condition for the next stroke. The player must not set an object down anywhere on or off the green to show line of play and this is not permitted even when the object is removed prior to the stroke.

The player’s caddie must not stand on or close to the line of play for any reason and must move from behind the player as soon as the player starts to take his stance. For players who use a caddie a good part of this Rule pertains to what a caddie can and cannot do so it is imperative that you read it in detail. For those young players who use a parent as a caddie at USGA qualifying events, it would be wise for the player and the parent to review the Rule together. Remember, when a parent is helping as a caddie, the other parent cannot move the cart with the player’s clubs or assist in any manner as a player can only have one caddie at a time.

The General Penalty is applied for each violation of this Rule.
Rule 11 – Ball in Motion Hits Person, Animal or Object.

If a player's ball in motion after a stroke accidentally hits any person or outside influence there is no penalty. This is true even if the ball strikes the player himself, another player, an opponent or their equipment. The player must then accept the consequences of the outcome by playing the ball as it lies. There is one exception; in Stroke Play only, when a ball played from the green strikes another ball at rest on that green, the player incurs a penalty of two strokes.

If a player's ball in motion comes to rest upon a person, animal or outside influence it obviously cannot be played and relief must be taken. The Rule provides relief using two different scenarios: (1) a ball played from off the putting green; and (2) a ball played on the putting green. The distinction is important.

In respect to a ball played from off the green it might be helpful to use an example and we will use a golf cart for that purpose. You hit a shot from the fairway and it comes to rest on the seat of a cart. In order to put the ball back into play you first determine the reference point which is directly under the cart straight down from where the ball lies. Its where the ball would actually lie if the cart vanished. You will drop a ball in the relief area, a space which is one club length from the reference point. The relief area must be the same condition as the reference point and it cannot be nearer the hole.

When the ball is played from the putting green and hits any person or movable obstruction, the stroke is canceled and played again from its original spot with one exception; if the ball played from the green strikes another ball at rest or ball mark on that green, the stroke is not canceled and the ball is played as it lies with the applicable penalty.

A second part of this Rule pertains to a ball in motion which is deliberately deflected or stopped. It applies when a person touches a ball or when an object is put in place to stop or deflect a shot. A player gets a penalty of two strokes when he stops or deflects a ball in motion and that includes the player's ball or any other ball. Taking relief is done by determination of where the ball “would” have come to rest and that spot becomes the reference point. Drop a ball in the relief area which is defined as one club length from the reference point. If the ball would have come to rest on the green, place the ball on the reference point. If the ball would have come to rest out of bounds or in a PA, you proceed, accordingly, under the applicable Rule. When a ball is in motion the player must not deliberately take action to affect where it might come to rest by the removal of loose impediments or movable obstructions; except that removed flagsticks, a ball at rest on the green and equipment of the players may be moved.
Rule 12 - Bunkers

Bunkers are specially prepared areas which test a player's ability to play from sand, or the like. A ball is in a bunker when it touches the sand or when it rests on a movable obstruction or abnormal ground condition which is within a bunker.

Before playing a ball in a bunker, the player may remove loose impediments and movable obstructions and is permitted to touch the sand as may be reasonable and necessary while doing so.

Before playing a ball in a bunker the player must not touch the sand with a hand, a club, or a rake for the purpose of testing how the sand will respond to the next stroke. The player is also prohibited from placing a club directly in front or behind the ball; by making a practice stroke, or touching the sand while moving the club back for the stroke. The penalty for violation of this provision is the General Penalty.

There will be no penalty if the player touches the sand in a bunker as he places his feet in creating a stance; rakes an adjacent (not near the ball) area to maintain the course; places clubs in the bunker; lifts the ball pursuant to a Rule; leans on a club while resting or to maintain balance and prevent a fall; and, striking the sand in frustration or anger.

Once the ball has been played out of a bunker, the player may touch or smooth the sand even if the ball might roll back into that bunker. Please make sure you smooth all marks made by you in every bunker as you leave it.

We will examine taking relief for an unplayable ball in a bunker under Rule 19.
Rule 13 - The Putting Green

The Putting Green is specially prepared for rolling a ball on the surface and it has different Rules to help achieve that purpose by enabling the player to clean the ball, repair damage and remove sand and loose soil. The term, “Line of Putt” is now included in the term, “Line of Play” and there is no penalty for touching it.

A ball lies on the green when it touches any part of the green. A player may repair damage to a green even when the ball lies off the green. Damage to a green includes all manner of defects except; aeration holes, natural defects and normal wear on the hole. Damage should be repaired using a ball-mark repair tool, tees, clubs or similar equipment and it must be done so as not to delay play. Damage that may be repaired includes; ball marks, spike marks and other shoe damage, scrapes and indentations caused by equipment, old hole plugs, seams of cut turf, and tracks made by animals.

When a ball or ball mark on a green moves, the following applies. If it moved for no apparent reason or if natural forces (gravity, earthquakes, wind, etc.) caused the ball to move, it is to be played as it lies, from the new location and there is no penalty. If a player or any other person accidentally moved the player's ball it must be replaced; without penalty. In the event a player has lifted his ball for any reason, and replaced it, any unintentional movement of the ball thereafter, by any cause, is attributed to the player and it must be replaced, without penalty. A player's ball may be replaced by: the player; or, the person who moved it. If a player who is required to replace a ball fails to do so he incurs the General Penalty.

When a ball comes to rest on a wrong putting green or in the case of interference with stance by a wrong putting green, relief is mandatory. The player must drop a ball in the relief area, one club length of the reference point which is the nearest point for complete relief in the General Area, and not nearer the hole. Complete relief (feet and club not touching the green) must be taken.

The flagstick may be left in the hole during play on a green. When a player has decided to leave the flagstick in the hole and not have it attended (meaning removed as ball approaches the hole) no other player may move the flagstick to affect where the player's ball might come to rest. If a player’s ball comes to rest against a flagstick and partially in the hole, the ball is treated as holed even if the entire ball is not below the surface.

When a ball overhangs the hole the player is allowed a reasonable time to approach the hole and an additional ten seconds. If the ball falls in during the wait period the player has holed out with the previous stroke. If the ball falls in after the 10 second wait period, the player has holed out but must add one penalty stroke.
Rule 14 – Lifting the Ball and Replacing

In order to lift a ball which must be replaced, its position must be marked. Without touching the ball, slide the mark down behind the ball and then lift the ball. To put the ball back into play; without touching the marker the player replaces the original ball on the marked spot and removes the marker. A dime is a handy marker. The toe of a putter may also be used. If the player lifts the ball without first marking its position, marks its spot in a wrong way or makes a stroke with the ball marker left in place, the player incurs a penalty of one stroke.

The ball may be lifted by the player or anyone authorized by the player. A caddie may lift the player’s ball on the putting green but not elsewhere. It can be replaced by the player or the person who lifted it. A ball lifted from a green may always be cleaned. A ball lifted from off the green may be cleaned except when it was lifted: (1) because it interferes with another player; (2) for purposes of identification; or (3) to see if it is damaged and then only to the extent necessary. If a player cleans a ball when not permitted he incurs one penalty stroke.

Dropping a ball in a relief area is done by the player letting it fall straight down from the level of the player’s knees and there must not be any attempt to influence where it might come to rest. The ball must be dropped in and come to rest in the relief area. If a dropped ball is deliberately deflected or stopped by any player, that player incurs the General Penalty. Note this “eraser” provision; when a player has mistakenly substituted a ball when not permitted, dropped or placed it incorrectly in a wrong place or used a wrong procedure, the error can be corrected if done immediately before that ball is played. There is no penalty. If a player does not drop again but plays it from where it was dropped in a wrong way, he incurs one penalty stroke but has not played from a wrong place.

A player must not play a ball from a wrong place and if he does he incurs the General Penalty. A wrong place is any space on the course where play is not permitted; playing a ball that was lifted and not properly replaced; playing a dropped ball from outside the relief area; and, taking relief under a wrong Rules so the ball is played from a place not permitted. If there was no serious breach, (player did not gain a significant advantage) the player will complete the hole with the ball played from the wrong place, plus 2 penalty strokes. If a serious breach occurred, the player must correct the mistake and play a second ball in accordance with the Rules and report the error to the Committee. If the player fails to correct the error the penalty is DQ. In the case of a serious breach the score with the second ball counts with 2 penalty strokes. If there is a question of whether the breach might be serious, the player should complete the hole with two balls and report that to the Committee. The Committee will determine the player’s score for that hole. If the player fails to report to the Committee the penalty is DQ.
Rule 15 - Relief from Movable Obstructions and Loose Impediments

Loose impediments are made by nature and include; sticks, leaves, stones and loose gravel, aeration plugs, animal waste and ant hills. If the player has interference by a loose impediment anywhere on or off the course, the impediment may be removed. If the player causes the ball to move in the process, add one penalty stroke (unless the ball lay on the green), and the ball must be replaced.

Movable obstructions are man made objects and include; rakes, water bottles, towels and golf carts. If the player has interference by a movable obstruction anywhere on or off the course the obstruction may be removed. If the ball moves while the obstruction is being moved there is no penalty and the ball must be replaced. When the ball is ON the obstruction, relief is available as follows. The reference point is right under where the ball lies and a ball is dropped in the relief area which is the space within one club length and not nearer the hole. The term, “movable” means that it can be moved readily and without causing damage to the course or the object.

When it is known that the ball is in a movable obstruction and not found, the reference point to determine the relief area is the spot where the ball last crossed the edge of the obstruction. There is no penalty in taking relief.

For a ball at rest on the green, if the player believes it might help anyone’s play, he may lift the ball if it is his or have the ball lifted. In stroke play the player who is requested to life the ball may play instead.

If a player believes that another player's ball might interfere, he may request the other player to mark and lift that ball, which must not be cleaned. Interference here is when the ball interferes with stance or swing or close enough to the line of play to be hit by the ball in motion. If a ball marker interferes, the same relief is available and the marker may be moved.
Rule 16 - Abnormal Ground Conditions - Immovable Obstructions - Embedded Ball

Abnormal ground conditions include animal holes, ground under repair, immovable obstructions and temporary water. Relief is available without penalty when the player’s ball is in the condition or when it interferes with the player’s stance or area of intended swing. When the player’s ball is on the green, interference also exists if the condition intervenes on the line of play.

The player is also entitled to relief under this Rule in the event of the presence of a dangerous animal and when the ball comes to rest in a “No Play Zone”. By way of example, relief is available from fire ants and poisonous snakes and in our opinion all snakes are poisonous.

Relief is available when the condition is on the course (not OB) and the ball is on the course and not in a PA. Relief consists of determining the reference point; the nearest point for complete relief in the General Area, and dropping a ball in the relief area, the space which is one club length from the reference point, not nearer the hole. There must be complete relief from the condition.

If the condition is in a bunker the reference point and relief area must be in that bunker. If complete relief is not available (temporary water covers the entire area), obtain “maximum available” relief by dropping the ball in the shallow area, not nearer the hole. There is also the option to drop a ball out of the bunker straight back on an extension of the imaginary line formed by the flagstick and the spot where the ball lies, under penalty of one stroke.

If the player’s ball has not been found and it is virtually certain (95%) that the ball came to rest in an abnormal ground condition, use the point where the ball crossed the edge of the condition as the reference point.

When the player’s ball lies on the green, the reference point may be on the green or in the adjacent General Area and the ball is placed on that spot.

A player is entitled to free relief when the ball is embedded in the General Area but not in sand. An embedded ball must come to rest in its own pitch-mark from a previous stroke and part of the ball must be below the surface. A player may lift the ball to determine if it is embedded. If the player lifts the ball without having a reasonable belief that the ball is embedded, the player incurs a penalty of one stroke. In taking relief the reference point is right behind where the ball is embedded and the relief area is within one club length, no nearer the hole. The Committee may adopt a Local Rule allowing relief only for balls embedded in the General Area in places where the grass is cut to fairway height.
Rule 17 - Penalty Areas

A PA includes any body of water on the course (whether or not marked) such as a lake, pond, river, ditch, surface drainage area, even if not containing water; and any other part of the course the Committee decides to include. Since PAs may include desert and extreme rough in addition to what we called water hazards, the word “hazard” is obsolete and no longer used. A ball is in a PA when it lies on or touches the ground inside the area or, since the margin extend upward, when it overhangs any part of the PA. A player must know or be virtually certain (95% sure) that the ball is in a PA and, failing that, if the ball is not found it is lost.

We have yellow PAs and red PAs. When lines are used to mark the area, the line itself is in the PA. The color is significant in that it indicates which relief options are available. When there are no markings, a PA is deemed to be a red one. If the player’s ball is playable he may do so without penalty. If taking relief is necessary, the player incurs one penalty stroke and proceeds with one of the following:

Yellow - two relief options:
1. play again from the spot where the previous stroke was made (stroke and distance); or
2. draw an imaginary line from the flagstick through the point where the original ball last crossed the margin of the area and drop a ball anywhere on an extension of that line going straight back.

Red - in addition to both options above,
3. drop a ball in the relief area which is defined as two club lengths from the reference point which is the spot where the ball last crossed the margin of the area, no nearer the hole.

Committees are encouraged to expand the area marked with red lines so that lateral relief is more readily available.

When a ball played from a PA comes to rest in the same, or another PA, the three relief options are available. If the player proceeds to use Option # 1, stroke and distance, and drops in the first PA, he is still in a PA and may then elect to take other relief under options 2 and 3 with one additional penalty stroke for a total of 2 penalty strokes. If the player plays a ball from a Penalty Area and it is lost or out of bounds he must proceed under stroke and distance and this puts him back in the PA. He may take additional relief outside the PA as described above and with one additional penalty stroke for a total of 2 penalty strokes.

A reminder, a player will be allowed to touch or move loose impediments in a PA. The player is also permitted to touch the ground with a hand or club for any reason and this includes grounding the club right behind the ball subject only to the requirement that no improvement of the condition is made for the stroke.

If you regularly play at a facility which has “No Play Zones” we would encourage you to study Rule 17.1(e) as the procedure to take relief from Penalty Areas is explained in detail.
Rule 18 - Lost Ball or Ball Out of Bounds; Provisional Ball

A ball is lost if it is not found within three (3) minutes after the player, or his caddie, has begun a search for it. If a ball is found during the three minute period and it is uncertain whether it is the player's, the player must make a diligent effort to identify it and if it is the player's, it is in play even when the identification process has run over the permitted 3 minute period. NOTE the change to three (3) minutes; it ain’t very long!

A ball is out of bounds when all if it is over the boundary. If any part of the ball overhangs the course, it is in bounds. When a white line is used to mark the boundary, the line itself is out of bounds and when stakes or fence posts are used, it is the inside edge at ground level.

In the event of a lost ball or a ball out of bounds, under penalty of one (1) penalty stroke, the player must return and play a ball at the spot from which the previous stroke was made. When a player is virtually certain (95% sure) that the ball is lost in an immovable obstruction, abnormal ground condition, or PA, he may proceed to play according to the applicable Rule or, as an option, play under stroke and distance.

In order to save time, when it appears that a ball may be lost or is out of bounds, the player may use a Provisional ball. The player must announce that he is using a provisional ball. If the original is lost or out of bounds the provisional ball becomes the ball in play under stroke and distance. It is essential that in the announcement the player use the term, “provisional”. If the player says nothing and plays again or says something like, “I'm going to re-load” he is, in effect, putting that second ball into play and the original ball is no longer in play.

In respect to the provisional, play it until you arrive at the place where the original ball is likely to be. If the player plays a stroke with the provisional in front of where the original is likely to be, it becomes the ball in play and the original is out of play. When the original ball is found in bounds, the provisional is out of play and any strokes taken with it, including penalty strokes, are not included in the score for that hole. The player does not have an option to play either the original or the provisional.

Clubs are permitted to adopt a Local Rule for relief when a ball is lost or OB and the player has not played a provisional. The player estimates where the ball is (point 1) and imagines a line from the flagstick through point 1. Then the player goes to the nearest edge of the fairway (point 2), at a point equidistant to point 1, and imagines a line from the flagstick through point 2. Under penalty of two (2) strokes, the player drops a ball anywhere between those two line, or within two club lengths outside the second line and not nearer the hole than point 1. We suggest that clubs adopt this Local Rule to avoid the tedious trip back to play again.
Rule 19 – Ball Unplayable

At various time you will suffer the misfortune of having a ball come to rest in a position where it is impossible to play the next stroke, or potentially dangerous to do so. This Rule provides the means to put a ball back into play so you can continue the round.

The player, and only the player, may declare the ball unplayable at any spot on the course; except in a PA. Under penalty of one (1) stroke, the player may select from three options and they are; (1) play again at the spot of the last stroke (stroke and distance); OR, (2) draw an imaginary line from the flagstick to where the ball lies and drop a ball going straight back anywhere on an extension of that line; OR, (3) use the spot on which the ball lies as the reference point and drop a ball in the relief area which is two club lengths from the reference point. The ball must not be dropped nearer to the hole than the original spot. The penalty for playing a ball from a wrong place is the General Penalty unless a serious breach occurs. If the player elects to proceed under option # 1, it is not necessary that he first locate the original ball. If the player elects to proceed under the other two options, the original ball must be located.

When a player is in a bunker relief is available for a ball declared unplayable. Going back to play again from the previous spot (1) is again available. If the player wishes to proceed using the other options 2 -3 (above), the ball must be dropped in the bunker. A player in a bunker is given a 4th option and that is to drop a ball out of the bunker going straight back on an extension of the imaginary line between the flagstick and the spot on which the ball lies. And, if the player takes relief out of the bunker, he incurs one additional penalty stroke, making a total of two strokes in all.

Let us give you a warning about using option 3 and that is if the dropped ball rolls back into the condition, you start over with another penalty stroke.

When a player is in breach of Rule 19 the General Penalty is applied.
Rule 20 - Procedures When Issues Arise during Competition - Referees

In both match play and stroke play issues concerning the Rules will arise during the competition and this Rule tells us how to save the question for decision if an official is not available. In this respect it is important that play is not delayed while obtaining a ruling.

In match play the opponents are encouraged to resolve disputes and any such outcome is conclusive even if it turns out to have been wrong. If agreement is not possible, one player must notify the opponent that a later ruling will be requested. Any such request must be made timely, before another stroke is made. If the player makes a ruling request about an earlier breach, the following is required: (1) the opponent gave wrong information as to the number of strokes taken or failed to tell about a penalty incurred; (2) the request is based on facts not previously known; and, (3) after becoming aware, the request was then made in a timely fashion.

In stroke play the competitors are encouraged to assist with Rules issues. When a player believes that a fellow competitor has breached a Rule, the player should tell the competitor and an official promptly after becoming aware of the possible breach. Failure to protect the field by telling of the possible breach may result in the player’s DQ. When a player in stroke play has doubt as to how to proceed, the player may play two balls as follows. The player must announce; (1) two balls will be played; and, (2) the ball to count if the Rules permit. The player must report the situation to the Committee before returning the scorecard, even if the score with both balls are the same. Failure to report will result in DQ. If the Rules allow the procedures used for both balls, the score with the ball chosen counts. If there was a serious breach in playing both balls from a wrong place, the player is DQ. Strokes taken with the ball that does not count are not included in the score for that hole.

A Referee is an official appointed to decide questions of fact and apply the Rules and a decision by the Referee must be followed. There is no appeal from a Referee’s ruling. If there is no Referee, the Committee will make all decisions. If a ruling by a Referee or Committee is later found to be wrong it will, if possible, be corrected. If it is too late because the competition is closed, the wrong ruling stands.

A player can be DQ after the competition has closed if he; (a) returned a score for a hole lower than actually taken for any reason other than failure to include a penalty he did not know about; (b) knew before the competition closed that the reported handicap was higher than the actual handicap and it affected the strokes used to adjust the score; and, (c) knew before the competition closed that he was in breach of a Rules with a penalty of DQ.
**Rule 21 - Other Forms of Play - Stableford**

One of the great attributes of golf is that with proper handicaps the game will be competitive for players on different skill levels. No other game can make such adjustments. Another attribute is the different formats for playing competitions. This Rules tells us about some of those formats. To add a little variety to your weekend Nassau, we encourage you to give these a try.

Stableford is a format where a player’s net or gross scores will be assigned certain points. For example:

- Double bogey + = 0 points
- bogey = 1 “
- par = 2 “
- birdie = 3 “ and so on.

The player or side with the most points wins. In this format a player may elect not to hole out and receives “0” points for the hole. If a player breaches Rule 4 on clubs or Rule 5, time of starting, the Committee will deduct two points . If the player causes a delay in play, one point is deducted for a first violation and two points are deducted for a second violation. Other than these exceptions, the Rules of stroke play apply.

The Committee may establish a Maximum Score in stroke play. For example the Committee could select a triple bogie as the maximum. The hole is completed when a player holes out, chooses not to hole out or when the score reaches the capped number. The Rules of stroke play are applicable except that a player who breaches certain Rules is not DQ but gets the maximum number and those include; failing to hole out; failure to correct error for playing wrong ball; and failing to correct mistake for playing from wrong place and there is a serious breach.

A Par/Bogey competition is a stroke play competition which uses scoring as in match play. A player or side wins a hole by completing the hole in fewer stroke than the target score set by the Committee. A score on a hole that matches the target is said to halve the hole. A score of more than the target results in a loss of the hole. The winner is the player or side with the highest total of holes won versus holes lost (adding the hole won and subtracting the holes lost).

A Three-Ball Match is when each of three players play a match against the two other players at the same time. If player plays out of turn in one match, the opponent in that match may recall the shot and the players shot is canceled in only that match.
Rule 22 - Threesomes and Foursomes

In golf when you use the word “some” it implies that some of the players are playing some of the time. In other words, alternate shots. Confusion about this format causes the serious students of the Rules to cringe when the TV announcer refers to a group of three competitors as a “threesome”.

In the Foursome format, one player will play the tee shots on the even numbered holes and the other will play the tee shots on the odd numbered holes. After the tee shots, play on the hole will alternate until the hole is completed. If a penalty is incurred in the process it does not change the order of play.

If one player plays out of turn in match play, it is a loss of hole for the side.

If one player plays out of turn in stroke play, the side incurs a penalty of two strokes and it must correct the error before playing from the next tee or, on the final hole leaving the green, under the penalty of DQ. The right partner must make a stroke from where the side made the first stroke in the wrong order. The first stroke made in the wrong order and all subsequent strokes until the mistake is corrected are canceled, along with any penalty strokes.

If a stroke is canceled, or otherwise does not count under any Rule, the same partner who made the stroke must make the next stroke for the side. If the side elects to play a provisional ball, it must be played by the partner whose turn it is to play the next stroke.

Partners may share clubs so long as the total number of clubs they have together is not more than 14.
**Rule 23 - Four-Ball Competitions**

This is a form of play, either match play or stroke play, in which two partners compete together as a side with each playing his own ball and the side’s score for the hole is the lower score of either partner. In this format it is not necessary for both partners to play the entire round or hole out on each hole. Partners may share clubs so long as the total number they have together is not more than 14.

Scoring in stroke play must clearly identify as the score for the individual who actually made it. It is not enough to identify a score for the side in general. The penalty for a failure to identify each player is DQ. It seems to never fail that in a competition at least one side will write down the score for each hole along the top line of the scorecard and fail to indicate which one actually made the score. Then we carefully explain that it is the side whose score is improperly written down that is DQ as each side is responsible for their own scores.

In match play a player must not continue play of a hole which was conceded to him in order to assist his partner. If the player continues play, his score stands without penalty, but his partner’s (the player who was assisted) score cannot count for the side.

There are three situations where a player’s penalty also applies to his partner: (1). the 14 club Rule; (2). when the player’s breach helps his partner; and, (3) in match play when partner’s play hurts the opponents. In this respect, playing a wrong ball is not treated as helping partner or hurting an opponent and only the player gets the penalty even if the wrong ball belongs to the partner or opponent.

When a partner breaches certain Rules the side is DQ. Those Rules include, for example: playing by the Rules; use of equipment; unreasonable delay; suspension of play and Rules for the teeing ground. In stroke play only; a DQ will result from not certifying the scorecard and recording the wrong score for hole.

A breach by both partners results in the DQ of the side and those include starting the round, suspension of play; and in stroke play; failure to hole out; playing from wrong tee; and wrong ball. When breach by one player incurs a penalty of DQ, the player is not precluded from further play it simply means his score for the hole affected cannot count for the side.
Rule 24 - Team Competitions

This Rule tells us what is permitted in a Team Competition and, since we don’t conduct a lot of those, there is little need to have a lengthy discussion. Those high school and college golf coaches whose teams play in these events on a regular basis, should take the time to study this Rule and introduce it to their team members.

In a Team Competition, each side of players, a “Team”, may name a Captain and that person is authorized to make decisions for the team such as who plays and when. A Captain may be a player in the competition.

The one aspect of team Competition which should be noted is giving of advise to its members. In a Team Competition each side may designate one person who can give advice and this Rules refers to them as, “Advice Givers”. In college competitions this person is usually the Coach and the authority to give advice is indicated by a special badge which must be visible at all times. In competitions in which caddies are not permitted, another person may be designated as a second Advice Giver. During a competition a team member must not give advice or seek advice from another Team member, or anyone else. For any breach of the Rule the general penalty is incurred.