

Change is in the air

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Understanding *The Rules of Golf* can be maddening and frustrating even for the most experienced golfer. Yet many of us (especially those reading this column) enjoy working with the rules and relish in the challenges presented in interpreting those rules. Part of the challenge in understanding the rules is the fact that the Rules continually change and evolve along with the game itself. This month's column will review some of the major revisions to *The Rules of Golf* for 2006.

Like every game we play, there needs to be set guidelines to follow. The USGA is the governing body over amateur golf in the U.S. and Mexico and the R&A is the governing body for the rest of the world. These two organizations work together in developing *The Rules of Golf* book, which is reviewed and changed every four years. The last revision to the Rules of Golf occurred in 2004 and the next revision will be in 2008.

However, the *Decisions on the Rules of Golf* are revised and republished every two years, thus giving the rules-making bodies more flexibility in revising rule interpretations as they become necessary. This is a year in which the USGA has significantly revised a number of Decisions that went into effect January 1, 2006.

Perhaps the most talked-about change is a decision that allows the use of electronic measuring devices, including GPS based systems and laser rangefinders, in competitions. The new Decision, 14-3/.5, permits the adoption of a Local Rule allowing the use of devices that measure distance only (the measurement of other conditions

which may affect play, e.g., gradient or wind, remains a breach of Rule 14-3). In absence of such a Local Rule, the use of a distance measuring device remains contrary to the rules.

To allow or not to allow? The USGA will not allow these types of devices in any of its competitions, including those run by local associations. The California Golf Association board of directors has voted to allow the devices in all portions of the California Amateur Championship. The SCGA has approved the devices for SCGA Team Play and we

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will make a decision on using them in SCGA tournaments in advance of the season.

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Another significant change is to Decision 8-1/2, which now states that the distance between any objects, including one's golf ball to the hole, is considered to be a matter of public information and therefore not advice. Such information may be shared without restriction. When distance-measuring devices have been permitted by Local Rule, players may share such a device and may, due to the revision of Decision 8-1/2, share any measured yardage with another player.

The interpretation of 'normal

course of play', as used in Rule 4-3a (Damaged Clubs), has been relaxed to include damage to clubs through reasonable acts. Examples of acts which are in 'the normal course of play' and those that are not are included in revised Decision 4-3/1. A player is able to repair or replace a club that is damaged under the interpretation of 'normal course of play.' The Rule previously stated that damaging clubs in the normal course of play only occurred by actions related to making a stroke, a practice swing or a practice stroke. The revised decision now states that

reasonable acts include removing or replacing a club in the bag, using a club to search for or retrieve a ball, leaning on a club while waiting to play and accidentally dropping a club. Acts of abuse are still not considered in the 'normal course of play.'

A new decision has been added to address players who inadvertently stand on their line of putt.

Decision 16-1e/2 was added to clarify that making a stroke from the putting green using a stance astride or with one foot touching the line of putt or an extension of that line behind the ball is not considered to be a breach of Rule 16-1e (*Standing astride or on line of putt*) if this stance was inadvertent or to avoid stepping on another player's line of putt. The purpose of Rule 16-1e is to prevent the croquet-style of putting that Sam Snead made famous. This change makes sense, as most of us want to tap in our one-footers without standing on another player's line of putt and without being penalized.

Changes in the Rules of Amateur Status are discussed on page 9 of this issue of FORE Magazine.

The Rules of Golf are a continually evolving process. It is important to remember that we are all playing under the same rules set forth by the USGA and that these rules need to be respected and adhered to.