

# Changes in rules change the landscape

By Missy Jones • @missyjonjones

March 28, 2018



Well, here we go again. The 2018 ANA Inspiration kicks off the major championship season in Rancho Mirage, Calif., this week and people are talking about what happened last year with Lexi Thompson and the Rules of Golf. She was penalized four strokes during the final round when officials learned via e-mail from a viewer of an infraction that happened during the third round. Thompson was penalized two strokes for incorrectly replacing her ball and an additional two strokes for signing an incorrect scorecard. And let's be perfectly clear. The LPGA enforced the Rules of Golf. They correctly applied the penalties for how the rules were written and interpreted at the time. A question was posed to Lexi in the media center:

**How does it feel to almost single-handedly have changed the rules of golf, a rule that nobody liked?**

“ I don't look at myself that I changed the rule. I'm just happy that the rule changed so nobody else can be put through what I was put through last year.”

I don't completely agree that she changed the rules of golf but the events that happened certainly gave the governing bodies a starting point and a chance to work together with the pro tours to get some things amended. What resulted was Decision 34-3/10, an announcement about how the tours would handle viewer call-ins and also a change to the scorecard rule.

Decision 34-3/10 gives interpretations on how to use video evidence in making rulings.

In part, the Decision says that players are often required to determine a spot, point, position, line, area, distance or other location on the course to use in applying the Rules. Some examples include estimating where a ball last crossed the margin of a water hazard, estimating or measuring where to drop or place a ball when taking relief, estimating or measuring whether a ball that was dropped in taking relief was dropped in the correct location and whether it has come to rest in a position where a re-drop is required and replacing a lifted ball in relation to a ball-marker or replacing a ball on the spot from which it was accidentally moved.

*“Such determinations need to be made promptly and with care but often cannot be precise, and players should not be held to the degree of precision that can sometimes be provided by video technology. A 'reasonable judgment' standard is applied in evaluating the player's actions in these situations: so long as the player does what can reasonably be expected under the circumstances to make an accurate determination, the player's reasonable judgment will be accepted even if later shown to be wrong by the use of video evidence.”*

A player doesn't automatically get off the hook for not getting their ball in the right place but at least this Decision gives the Committee a chance to ask some questions as to the relevant facts of each situation. If we see a player has not gotten a ball back where they should we can ask why. The putting green is a pretty immaculate piece of real estate and the Rules expect you to do a pretty precise job in getting it replaced from where you lifted it. But if a player says they were distracted by other things going on or they had to move it a clubhead length away and then reach from the other side, for example, we might be able to conclude that they did the best that they could under the circumstances and have fulfilled the requirements of “reasonable judgment.”

The tours announced starting January 1, 2018, that they now assign officials to monitor the video broadcast of a competition to help identify and resolve Rules issues as they arise and that they will discontinue any steps to facilitate or consider viewer call-ins as part of the Rules decision process. Additionally, they approved the adoption of a Local Rule to eliminate the additional two-stroke penalty for failing to include a penalty on the scorecard when the player was unaware of the penalty. This means that if the facts of the Lexi situation were exactly the same this year, the Committee would rely on the officials to have caught the potential breach while watching the coverage the day before and the additional scorecard penalty would not apply either.

Committees will still use all the information they have at their disposal to get to the right ruling. This includes live video coverage or the word of a fellow competitor or spectator. Officials will ask questions and try to resolve things as quickly as possible. And as Thomas Pagel, USGA senior director of rules and amateur status stated, “The message we're putting out to fans is, What you've seen, we've seen. Have confidence in us running the event. We want you to be a fan. Enjoy watching the world's best players. Let the rules be handled inside the ropes between the players and officials.”

