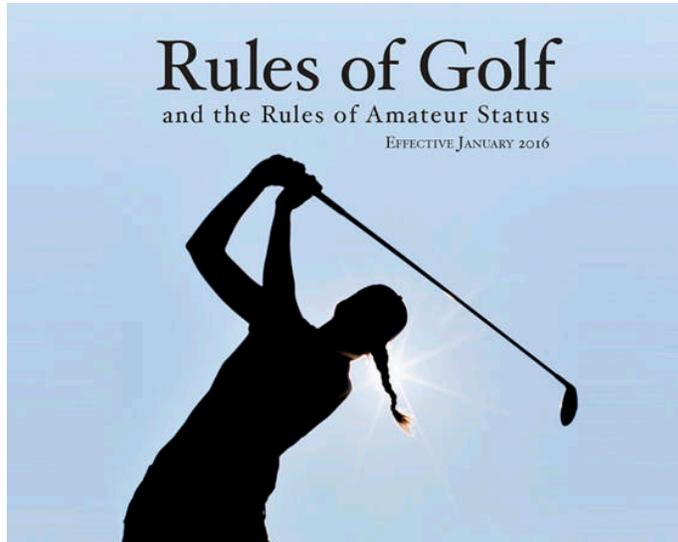


New Decision 34-3/10 - Now what?

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Nothing was announced that we haven't heard before but there are some interesting nuances revealed. A good thing that has evolved since the Lexi situation is that the USGA and the R&A are using the "reasonable judgment" standard when talking about estimating a spot on the green and to extending the "naked eye" test from one limited to whether a ball has moved to situations like the one that impacted Anna Nordqvist's playoff with Brittany

Lang in the US Women's Open last year in which she moved a few grains of sand in a bunker with her backswing.

A literal reading of the proposed new Rules for 2019 is that the "reasonable judgment" standard was only intended for estimating where a ball crossed the margin of a hazard, a nearest point of relief or similar situations, so the decision just announced appears to expand this standard into estimating where a ball must be replaced. The Committee will now have these two new standards at their disposal when making decisions out on the course but I'm not sure the jobs of officials will be any easier or any less potentially controversial.

Let's imagine some scenarios.

Scenario 1: We have the same set of facts with Anna Nordqvist in contention to win the 2016 U.S. Women's Open in Corde Valle in a playoff against Brittany Lang. The TV camera shot shows us that her club lightly scrapes the sand in the bunker in her backswing on Hole 17. The Committee is informed and rushes to the TV trailer to take a look. Now they have to decide if this could have been seen with the naked eye. They are calling the referees with the group and asking if they saw anything. Another component to the "naked eye test" is that the Committee will need to talk to the player and ask some questions. They need to find out if Anna was not "otherwise aware of a potential breach of the Rules." When do we do that in a timely and least obtrusive manner? And let's clear up this misconception right here. The only time referees walk with players are The Opens, the U.S. Opens and match play events like Solheim Cup, Ryder Cup, President's Cup and the International Crown. At a playoff like this, there are several

referees walking with the group. After doing their due diligence in investigating, the Committee decides that there is no penalty because there was no way anybody could have seen this without the slow motion replaying of the shot. Now what? During this process, this video has been looping over and over and is out there firing up the world and being commented on by the announcers in the booth and on the course. If done correctly, Anna knows what's going on because she has been questioned but manages to win in a playoff anyway. The world now hands her a win with an asterisk? How does she feel about it? Does she refuse the trophy and say she wants the penalty? Do we make sure she knows all the facts before she accepts so she can be put in the horrible position to make a public and messy decision? Yikes.

Scenario 2: Again, same set of facts with Lexi Thompson playing to win the ANA Inspiration in Rancho Mirage. The Committee gets information they need to review some video and rush to the TV trailer. Because the replacement of her ball is so far off from where it needs to be, it's likely she would not get off the hook with the "reasonable judgment" standard because an inch matters as much as a mile, especially on the putting green. We can't forget the basic tenet of the game to play the ball as it lies and that being able to lift your ball on the green is a privilege that comes with the responsibility to get it back to the right place. For this conversation, let's say the Committee decides she did the best she could and there is no penalty. Like Anna Nordqvist, the video is out there and putting her in an impossible situation. Does a player want to win like that? The world would still be outraged but for different reasons. We just can't win.

Interestingly, a somewhat different approach to a potential rules fiasco happened at the Masters this year. There was a question as to whether Sergio's ball moved when he was in the pine straw left of the hazard on Hole 13. While the Committee was reviewing the video, the footage was not shown anymore nor talked about much. The Committee talked to the referee involved, looked at the video and decided no penalty while the world just continued to watch golf. This was a very similar situation to those with Anna and Lexi but we didn't have the social media frenzy in the court of public opinion. There were some on Twitter that actually voiced they thought the ball moved but that they were glad that no penalty was given. Was it the right way to handle it or the right rules call? We will probably never know and we need to decide if we care. What is better? The way the Sergio situation played out or the other ones? You decide.

Unfortunately we now live in a world bent on sensationalism and firing up outrage with facts and non-facts. A desire to get the most clicks on websites and to wrap ourselves in controversy like a comfy blanket. The Rules of Golf are never going to take all the pain out of making decisions on the course and penalties being given and they shouldn't even try. With each proposed change and new decision being written, we will have fall out and a domino effect that may or may not make things any better. The people who don't want video or call-ins being contemplated at all need to think about the downside to that. What if we see a blatant violation or downright cheating in the background of a

video just because some one watching on TV saw it before an official became aware of it on their own? Do we just ignore that? And how do we contemplate video quality issues? Some events have high quality slow motion and/or high definition cameras out there and some don't. Just compare the quality of the videos of Anna's situation versus Lexi's to see what I mean. Is this the game we love and want? Be careful what you ask for because you just might get it.

All of these things aside, there are some really positive things coming ahead with the working group consisting of the governing bodies and all the major tours weighing in. They will address viewer call-ins and applications of penalties after the scorecard has been signed among other topics. All the golf insiders who want to get it right are working together to try and get this all figured out. This collaboration is something that will only benefit the game we all love as we move forward.

Decision 34-3/10 can be found here:

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