

Cut us some slack

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As we end our golf season and move on from the current set of Rules into the great frontier of Rules 2019, I have some words of encouragement and a plea for understanding. This is arguably the biggest change in our Rules universe we have ever experienced. I'm not talking about the little things that we have seen evolve over the years. I'm talking BIG changes.

- We are dropping from knee height into a prescribed relief area or dropping zone and it needs to STAY in that relief area or dropping zone. If your ball strikes you or your equipment after it hits the ground on a drop you just play it.
- The lip, wall or face of the bunker is no longer deemed to be IN the bunker.
- We can fix almost anything on the putting green and there are all kinds of changes where we forgive accidental acts on the green. If you accidentally move your ball on the green, there is no penalty and you replace it. If you have marked, lifted and replaced your ball and natural forces move it, you replace it.
- We only get three minutes to search for a ball.
- The teeing area becomes a free for all where you can re-tee or move any ball if it happens to stay there after a whiff, for example.
- We have tiers for which area of the golf course the ball might lie when deciding which rule to use.
- You can't replace a damaged golf club no matter HOW it got damaged by you.
- You still can't practice from a bunker between holes near the green last played or next tee but you can from a penalty area.
- You no longer get a penalty when you double hit the ball, hit yourself or your equipment with the ball or move your ball while searching for it.



- You have until you return your scorecard to fix mistakes like playing a wrong ball on the last hole. You can “undo” some things before making a stroke and not get a penalty that you couldn’t before, like replacing a removed OB stake or tee marker.
- Caddies can’t stand behind player and it’s two strokes each time they do. It can’t be undone unless it is on the putting green and the player backs off and starts over.
- We can substitute another ball almost anytime we have the ball in our hand in taking free or penalty relief. If we are replacing on a marked or estimated spot we need to use the original ball.
- We can move loose impediments in bunkers. We can move loose impediments, take practice swings and ground our club in penalty areas.
- We don’t get a penalty if our putt strikes the flagstick. If your ball is resting against the flagstick and any part is below the surface, it is holed.

And these are just some of the obvious changes. We have to erase the hard drives in our brains and rewrite the “facts.” Let’s be honest. We are facing a lot of change.

As the new season starts and we all try to get the right answer in each situation, whether as an official or a player, we are going to screw up somewhere. There are just too many moving pieces to think we won’t. Players, professional and amateur, officials and media will all get something wrong somewhere. The changes are good, but we have a steep learning curve ahead of us. So I’m asking you to cut officials and each other some slack. Let’s all work and learn together while we ease into our new reality on the golf course.