

New Golf Rules

In the March Newsletter Jack commented on the biggest set of changes in a generation that will be coming into force at the earliest effective January 1, 2019. He mentioned ten of the changes that he considered to be the most important. Prior to the new Rules of Golf being finalised the Royal and Ancient Golf Association (RANDA) and the United States Golf Association (USGA) will be going through a consultative phase where they would like to hear from golfers, clubs, other golfing bodies and anyone who is involved with golf to give them their opinion about the rules they want to change, the rules they haven't changed and things you'd like to see changed. Once that comment period is done on August 31, golf's governing bodies will review the feedback and finalise the new rules, with the plan to announce them early in 2018 before the 2019 adoption date.

If everything goes according to plan, starting in 2019, the Rules of Golf, authored jointly by the USGA and RANDA and used by millions of golfers worldwide, will look very different than it does now. Two changes that many of us golfers would like to see addressed are not (yet) in the proposed new Rules of Golf, namely a) If you were hoping stroke and distance penalties for losing a ball or hitting a ball out of bounds were going away, the rule makers were not there yet. They could have treated an out of bounds situation the same as if you had hit into a lateral water hazard, so you wouldn't have to return to the previous spot to play your next shot, and b) if you had hoped that obtaining relief from a divot in the fairway would be included (as Jack Nicklaus favoured) and treated as ground under repair, the organisations felt that players encounter good breaks and bad breaks throughout a round, and this is one of those times where the golf gods are not (yet) on your side.

Having discussed the proposed changes with many of our members over the last few weeks, I get the general feeling that it is too early for most of us to go into any great detail on the changes that are likely to occur. For those who would like to delve into the intricacies of the changes and what it might all mean to them the first port of call should be RANDA's and USGA's own websites, www.randa.org and www.usga.org. From mid-year 2018 I propose that we hold a number of workshops, both on and off the course, so that our members can familiarise themselves with the changes. If you go into the 2019 golf season without spending at least a certain amount of time familiarising yourselves with the new Rules of Golf you are likely to breaking even more rules in the future than you are at present!