

Reasons for change

Because putting greens are specially prepared for playing the ball along the ground, the Rules allow the player to do things on the green that are not allowed anywhere else: Given this philosophy of allowing players to try to have a smooth surface for rolling the ball, there is no conceptual reason for prohibiting repair of many types of damage (whether made by players, animals etc.).

This Rule change will eliminate the frequent questions among players and referees about whether a particular area of damage on the green is a ball-mark that may be repaired or is a shoe mark or other damage that must not be repaired.

This change will also reduce the current tension between prohibiting a player from repairing damage while playing a hole and then encouraging the player to repair that damage (such as repairing the ragged edge of the hole or tapping down spike marks) as a courtesy to following groups or in care of the course (Current Decisions 1-2/0.7 and 1-2/3.5).

The Rule against unreasonable delay (as well as a Committee's pace of play policy) can be used to address situations where a player seeks to make excessive repairs and cause unreasonable delay.

The change that will allow a player to repair almost all damage on the putting green is a further reason why the prohibition on merely touching the line of putt is no longer needed.

No advantage is gained if a player or his or her caddie merely touches the surface of the putting green on the line where the ball will be played.

Over time, the current prohibition on touching the line of putt has become subject to many exceptions.

The current prohibition is difficult to administer and penalties are not often applied; and those penalties that are applied may be perceived as serving little or no purpose, such as when a caddie accidentally touches the line of putt with the flagstick.

Allowing a player to putt with the flagstick in the hole without fear of penalty should generally help speed up play:

For example, if a putt is long enough that the player cannot easily see the hole unless the flagstick is left in, the player currently needs to wait for another person to attend the flagstick even if it is the player's turn to play or (in stroke play) if the player is ready to play and it would save time to go ahead and do so.

When the players do not have caddies, the current Rule can result in considerable delay, for example when all players in the group have long putts or the other player is delayed in coming to the green.

In match play, a player without a caddie will now be able to choose to putt with the unattended flagstick in the hole rather than ask the opponent to attend the flagstick, reducing the potential for dispute that can arise when the opponent attends for the player (such as when the opponent fails to remove the flagstick and the ball hits it).

On balance it is expected that there should be no advantage in being able to putt with the unattended flagstick in the hole.