

# RULES TO THE MAX



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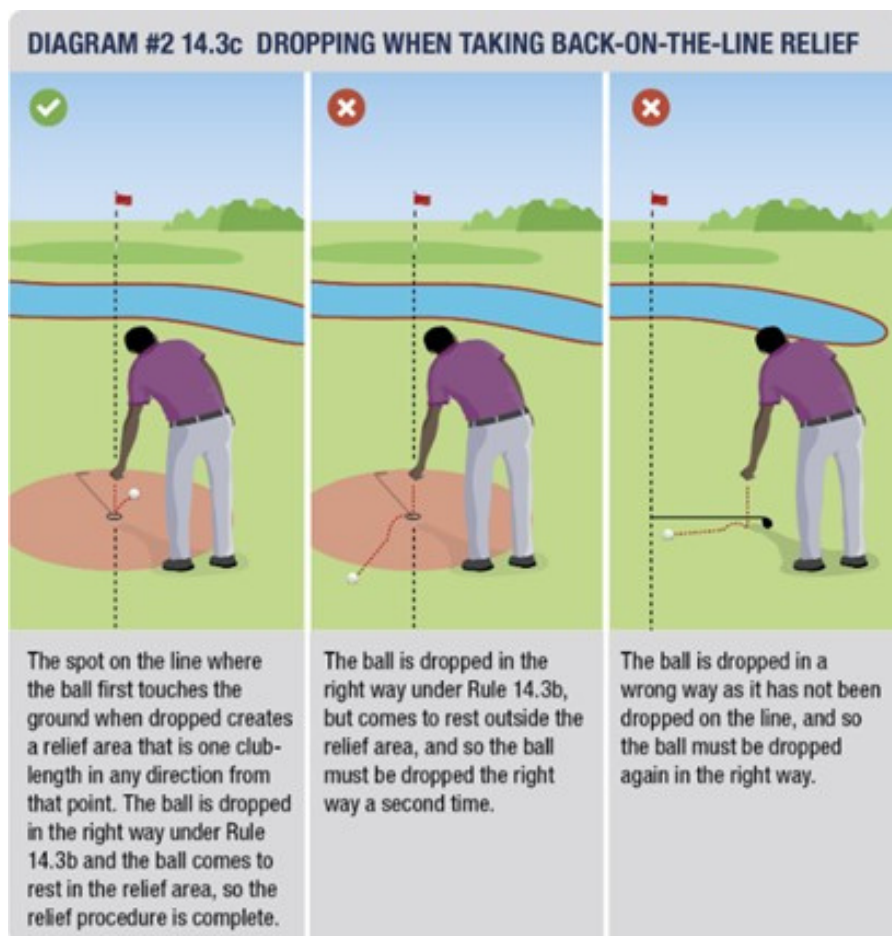
As we have arrived in the new year, we have crossed another milestone on New Year's Day 2023: the quadrennial revision of the Rules of Golf book has gone into effect. While this revision is nowhere near as drastic as the one in 2019, there are some significant changes that will certainly affect your play in the upcoming seasons. The new Rules of Golf books have recently become available for purchase at [usga.org](https://usga.org), and I'd recommend that anyone playing competitive golf or responsible for officiating at their Club pick one up prior to the start of the next golf season (or download the USGA Rules app for free!).

Please keep reading for a summary of the most dramatic changes, but be aware that this is not a complete list - a more comprehensive study of the new Rules will be necessary for a fuller understanding of the more nuanced changes. Please feel free to check in on NEPGA U for a couple seminars on the changes that I've conducted so far this spring.

## ***Back-on-the-Line Dropping Procedure***

In my experience over the last few years, one of the Rules that players struggled to understand the most was how to correctly drop a ball back-on-the-line when taking relief from penalty areas or unplayable balls, among a few other things. This was understandable, since the procedure was so complicated, it required the use of a Local Rule to avoid trapping players into a wrong place penalty during a procedure that should be so simple. To the USGA's credit, they have simplified the back-on-the-line procedure wonderfully, allowing for a much more user-friendly application of the Rules. Starting in 2023, the procedure will be just this simple: drop your ball on the line, and if it comes to rest within one club-length of where it first touches the ground, it's a good drop! There are a few more nit-picky

conditions that have to be met so be sure to read the full text of the applicable Rules, but this relief option has become so much easier for the average golfer to understand.



### ***Replacing a Broken Club***

Under the 2019 Rules, if a player broke a club during the normal course of play, they were generally not allowed to replace it. Their only options were to continue playing with the damaged club for the rest of the round, to repair the club in limited ways, or to take it out of play. Beginning this year, any club that is broken (except in cases of abuse) during a round can be replaced. This seems fair enough to me, since the accidental breaking of a club doesn't have any relationship to a player's talent, so it probably shouldn't affect the outcome of a competition. The caveat is that a player who breaks a club over their knee, for example, will be punished for that behavior by losing the right to replace the club.

### ***Ball Played from Putting Green Hits Insect on Putting Green***

Under the 2019 Rules, if a ball played from the putting green hit an insect, the stroke wouldn't count and the player must re-play from the previous spot. Given how common it is for an insect to be on the putting green, and how many golfers were unaware of this Rule, we can only imagine how many players were playing from the wrong place after hitting an insect on the green every day. With this in mind, the 2023 Rules have changed the outcome here: if a ball played from the putting green hits an insect on the green, the stroke counts and the ball will just be played as it lies. This makes great sense to me, for the reasons listed above, and due to the fact that insects are loose impediments and can be removed prior to the stroke if the player is concerned that they could affect the motion of the ball. Please note that insects are not the only things affected by this change, they're just the most common. I'd recommend a thorough reading of Rule 11.1 to learn about the other changes, since it contains the most dramatic overhaul of any Rule in the book.

### ***Player Not Responsible for Showing Handicap on Scorecard***

This is the change that could affect tournament administration at your club the most: beginning in 2023, players will no longer be responsible for ensuring that their scorecards show their handicaps. Under the new rules, the responsibility of calculating the correct playing handicap and the player's net score will land solely on the Committee (and when you're running a tournament at your club, that means you!). The good news is that you won't have to issue as many penalties for bad scorecards as you used to. The bad news is that the pressure is on you to get the handicaps right, since the responsibility is yours now. The only responsibility that's left on the player is if they are aware that you've given them the wrong handicap, they have to tell you about it.

But everybody makes mistakes – what happens if you calculate or apply a handicap incorrectly? That's what's known as an “administrative mistake” in the Rules, which is different than a wrong ruling. The main difference here is that an administrative mistake must always be corrected, and there is NO time limit for making that correction, even if the results of the competition are already final. So long story short, if you do make this type of mistake, you just apologize and make sure you get it right at the end of the day. You can check out Rule 20.2 for more information on this.

### ***To Wrap Up***

Like I mentioned before, this is just a cherry-picked sample of some of the changes that have taken place. A full reading of the new Rules book will be necessary to fully protect your interests on the course, and to effectively officiate the tournaments at your facility. As always, I'm available to help by phone or email if you don't know what to do – let's enjoy this new journey with the new Rules, and let's get all the rulings right in 2023!