

Supers Get Their Say

Protecting your greens from the unintended consequence of putting with the flagstick in

Well, we're about halfway through the winter now, and we'll be back out on the course again before we know it! While the golf courses of New England lie dormant for the season, the wheels of the golf industry keep on spinning behind the scenes, with many NEPGA Professionals visiting the PGA Merchandise Show last month and continuing to prepare for the busy upcoming golf season. Likewise, the wheels of the USGA Rules Committee continue to spin year-round as well, and following the pattern of the past year or so, they've given us a few updates to the Rules of Golf to begin the new year.

This first one may prove to be a favorite of our Superintendents, many of whom have been lamenting increasingly worn or damaged cups as more golfers have gotten into the habit of putting with the flagstick in. While previously the Equipment Rules specified that no attachments were allowed lower than 3 inches above the ground, the USGA has made an exception to that Rule, perhaps to mitigate the damage done while pulling a ball out of the hole with the flagstick in: under the new Rule, "attachments to the pole may be permitted more than 3 inches below the putting green surface but must be constrained to this area." The practical effect of this change is that golf courses are now permitted to use ball-removal discs (similar to the ones that have been in use on prac-



← Tweet



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Ok, so only a few weeks into the golf season and self-admittedly I'm a huge fan of the pin in rule change but I've noticed way more damage around the cup than normal for this time of year. This was after just one day. Usually cup edges rock solid this time of year w/good roots



#RulesToTheMax

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tice greens for years) on the flagsticks on the golf course, the intended effect being that players can remove their golf balls from the hole without damaging it by simply pulling the pin. This practice is already being utilized at various courses around Florida and elsewhere, and may be a good option to help protect the condition of your facility's putting greens. The important thing is that the attachment must be constrained to more than three inches below the surface of the green at all times!

The second change implemented in the new year applies to the Equipment Rules again, and has to do with Rule 4.3a: Allowed and Prohibited Use of Equipment. The new text goes into detail about "alignment devices," and explains how using one can cause a breach of Rule 4.3a. The gist of the Rule is that if you use a ball marker of a certain size, that's been manufactured or modified to help you orient your ball on your line of play, you are in breach of Rule 4.3a. The Equipment Rules go into great detail about what features constitute an alignment device, but I'll just hit the highlights here: if your ball marker is larger than two inches in any horizontal direction, and has a line or similar directional indicator that is longer than two inches, you may not use that ball marker to help orient the markings on your ball along the line of play. As I mentioned, I've just scratched the surface of what constitutes an alignment device, and have only mentioned the most likely way somebody could breach



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the Rule out of ignorance. If you're unsure about whether your ball marker is admissible in tournament play, or you're unsure if one of your members is in breach of the Rule in club tournament play, please consult Part 7 of the Equipment Rules for more clarification.

The final clarification of the Rules issued by the USGA so far this year isn't a change of a Rule, but more like a public service announcement about backstopping, which all golfers would do well to keep in mind, in order to maintain good sportsmanship and the integrity of the game. Backstopping is when one player leaves their ball in a position near the hole where another player, whose ball lies off the green, could benefit from the ball being there (it could stop the second player's ball from running down a steep slope, for example). While there is a penalty for making an agreement to leave the ball there (as this would be a conspiracy against the other players in the field), there is no penalty if no agreement is made. While the USGA did not see fit to modify this Rule, they have issued a best practice/recommendation regarding the topic: "in stroke play, if there is a reasonable possibility that a player's ball close to the hole could help another player who is about to play from off the green, both players should ensure that the player whose ball is close to the hole marks and lifts that ball before the other player plays. If all players follow this best practice, it ensures the protection of the best interests of everyone in the competition." As I said, this is not a change to the Rules and is therefore not a requirement but in stroke play, many of the other players are not going to be present to protect their interests so it's up to every golfer to protect their competitors' interests for them. As golf is a game of honor, this practice is just something to keep in mind to help maintain the integrity of a game that is built on just that... Integrity.