

“Consultation Draft” of the golf croquet rules

A “Consultation Draft” of the 5th edition of the Golf Croquet Rules was released on 1st March. Before the new rules will come into force and replace the 4th edition, you have a chance to give feedback. This can be done by sending your feedback your state coordinator of golf croquet refereeing. VCA members should send feedback to gcreferees@croquetvic.asn.au by 19th April. The feedback you send could be to point out inconsistencies or ambiguities in the rules, or just typos. You can also say what you particularly like or strongly dislike about the new rules. Bear in mind that, although the rules committee will fix flaws in the rules, they are unlikely to respond to personal preferences - unless there is a huge groundswell in those preferences.

This article is aimed at those who have a fair knowledge of the current rules and describes the main changes to the rules. One of the biggest changes is in the definition of faults. There are no longer non-striking and striking faults. They are treated essentially as striking faults but have been combined into a single category, simply called “Faults”. It is important to note that some actions that were non-striking faults, will not be treated as faults at all but will be dealt with under a new rule on “Interference by a Player”.

As with striking faults under the old rules, there will be no loss of turn for a fault. The turn simply ends. It might feel like a loss of turn to a player who is penalised for a fault if his opponent chooses to put the balls back where they were before the stroke. But if it’s ruled as interference rather than a fault, stationary balls moved would be replaced, moving balls affected would be placed where they would have finished without the interference, and whoever’s turn it was to play next would remain the same.

Striking period.

According to the new rules, a “stroke” can be played by any player using any ball. The changes to the rules covering faults are achieved by changing the definition of the start of striking period. Under the new rules,
“the striking period starts when a player takes a stance with apparent intent to play a stroke”.

Thus, the striking period starts earlier and applies to any player (not just the striker) who apparently intends to play any ball (not just the striker’s ball). That way, it covers many situations that used to be treated as non-striking faults. The definition of the end of the striking period has not changed except that it also refers to any player. The actions that used to be treated as non-striking faults, but will now be treated as interference are those that

- occur outside the striking period, or
- occur during the striking period by a player other than the one attempting to play a stroke.

The definition of the striking period also has a clause to cover the situation where a player, having taken a stance, clearly steps away from it under control without playing a stroke. This might happen, for example, if the player decides to re-stalk his ball.

Strokes and Faults.

Under the new rules, if a player commits a fault, they are *also* considered to have played a stroke. The stroke is considered to have been played with the ball he intended to play regardless

of whether contact with that ball was first or second, or even if there was no contact with that ball at all (e.g. with court damage or touching a ball other than the one the player intended to play). Also, a player can deem a stroke to have been played. As before, an “air shot” is not a stroke. More specifically, a stroke is not played “*if a player misses or fails to reach the ball they intended to strike*”, and they did not commit a fault.

Some actions that were striking faults have been dropped from the list. It will no longer be a fault to play a stroke while touching the head of the mallet with a hand, resting the shaft of the mallet or a hand or arm on the ground or an outside agency or against any part of the legs or feet. Playing a stroke before the previous turn has ended is also no longer a fault, but it will be penalized under a different rule called “Overlapping Play”.

There is an important change to the action after a fault. The non-offending side still chooses what to do with the balls, but if they are left where they stopped, *a hoop run by the non-offending side will be counted*. If the balls are replaced, no point is scored for any ball. If a player commits more than one fault in a stroke, there is no additional penalty. The limit of claims for a fault has changed slightly. There is no remedy for a fault if play is not stopped before a stroke has been played, either by the non-offending side (whether valid or invalid), or by the offending side if they were replaying a stroke they were required or entitled to play.

Interference.

As part of the change to dealing with faults, a rule has been introduced that covers “Interference by a Player”. The rules still say to treat players from another game as outside agencies. This new rule refers to players of the same game and says, “*Except when playing a stroke, a player interferes with a ball when they move, shake or touch it with their mallet or any part of their body, clothes or personal property, either directly or by contact with a hoop or the peg*”. Under the old rules, moving, shaking or touching a ball (except where permitted) would have been a non-striking fault. Under the new rules, if it happens outside the newly defined striking period, it is not a fault but treated as interference, and there is no loss of turn.

Another change is that “personal property” is mentioned in new rules. There were references to body and clothes in the old non-striking and striking fault rules. In the new rules, there are references to body, clothes and *personal property* in the interference and faults rules. Personal property also gets a special mention when describing scoring clips in the rule covering “Accessories” (see below).

Accidental interference will be treated as a fault if it done during the striking period by a player playing or intending to play a stroke. Otherwise it will be treated much like other types of interference. Remember, for interference there is no loss of turn. There is a rule covering *deliberate* interference which is treated like accidental interference except that the “Behaviour” rule might apply. The “Behaviour” rule replaces the “Etiquette” rule. There are more details about the Behaviour rule below. A player is not guilty of *deliberate* interference when

- touching a ball which is an outside agency; or
- moving or touching a ball in accordance with these Rules; or
- marking or cleaning it with the permission of the opponent (or a referee, if present); or
- stopping a ball shortly before it is clearly about to leave the court in order to save time, provided that the final position of the ball will have no tactical significance.

There are some other important changes to the “Interference” rule including the following.

- A player is entitled to relief from unevenness on the court surface due to damage in the jaws or the immediate vicinity of a hoop.
- There is now a six-yard rule. If a player is entitled to relief because “a fixed obstacle outside the court interferes with their swing or if uneven ground outside the court prevents them from adopting a level stance” and they intend to clear a ball which lies less than six yards from the original position of the ball they intend to strike, that ball is to be moved too, subject to the owner’s approval. The opponent might be happier giving the striker a closer target rather than risking an “in-off”. The one-yard rule still applies to other balls in this situation.
- There is a rule covering “Interference by Faulty Equipment”. The definition of a “*jammed ball*” has been extended to include where “*a player suspects that the outcome of a stroke they have just played was affected by a ball being in contact with both uprights of a hoop simultaneously*”, even if the ball did not remain wedged in the hoop. No replay is allowed if the player was not attempting to run the hoop, or if they committed a fault (unless it is agreed that the fault was caused by the faulty equipment).
- For interference with a moving ball by a moving outside agency (or a stationary one that was not in place) the outcome of the stroke being in doubt is limited to “*the main intended outcome of the stroke*”.
- Interference with a moving ball by a stationary outside agency that was in place is dealt with as before except that, if the opponent chooses to place the ball where it would have stopped, the referee decides where that would have been. In the absence of a referee, the opponent may decide that position. Also, the term “in place” is not used but replaced with the phrase “*stationary from when the stroke was played until the collision occurred*”.
- There is a rule covering interference and error in the same stroke. A player has committed an *error* if they played a wrong ball, committed a fault, were guilty of overlapping play or played after play has been forestalled. The error is dealt with first. If balls affected by the error are replaced where they were before the stroke, the interference is ignored.

Playing a Wrong Ball

The main change in the rule covering “Playing a Wrong Ball” is where replace and replay applied under the old rules. That is, where the striker played the partner ball of the one they should have played in singles (by far the most common form of wrong ball play) or where the striker’s partner played his own ball in doubles. Under both those situation, the non-offending side chooses whether (a) all balls moved are replaced where they were before the last stroke was played and the striker replays the stroke with the striker’s ball; or (b) play continues with a *penalty spot restart*. A penalty spot restart is where all four balls are to be next played from a penalty spot. The sides toss a coin and the losing side chooses from which of the two penalty spots to play. The side winning the toss plays first with either ball of their side. This change addresses a serious flaw in the old rules where a side could gain a huge and unfair advantage depending on when play was finally stopped after consecutive unnoticed wrong ball plays (where replace and replay would have applied in each case).

There are few other changes to the wrong ball rule. The principle that only the last wrong ball played can be dealt with still holds except where the same side played consecutive strokes when they shouldn’t have. Under the old rules, a side could condone its own wrong ball play. The new

rule dealing with when the “Same Side Plays Consecutive Strokes” prevents this except in situations where the same side playing consecutive strokes is legitimate.

Both the rules covering Faults and Playing a Wrong Ball say when it is too late for opponents to change their mind if they have made a choice about whether to leave balls where they stopped or to have them replaced. In both cases the non-offending side may not then change their decision if the balls are replaced, but if the balls are left where they stopped, the non-offending side may change their decision until they play a stroke.

The new rules clearly specify what should happen if a fault and wrong ball occur in the same stroke. The harsher penalty applies except if the error occurred in the first four strokes of a game. So, if the full penalty would apply for the wrong ball play, the fault is ignored, and the wrong ball rule is applied. If the option of replace and replay or penalty spot restart would have applied for the wrong ball play (without the fault), the wrong ball play is ignored, and the stroke is treated as a fault. If a fault and wrong ball occur in the same stroke and that stroke is one of the first four of the game, then the fault is ignored, and the appropriate wrong ball rule is applied.

Overlapping Play

A rule covering “Overlapping Play” will replace 6(e) and 6(f) in the old rules. This deals with the situations where two or more balls are caused to be in motion at the same time as the result of strokes played by two players. It also replaces 13(a)(14) in the old rules (“*plays before the previous turn ends*”). This rule is moderately complicated and, since it covers a situation that is fairly rare, I won’t describe it in detail here. Suffice to say that, if the overlapping play involved both sides and the striker’s side played a valid stroke (e.g. not a fault or wrong ball), the side that wasn’t supposed to play is penalised. If the overlapping play involved only one side, then that side is penalised, regardless of whose turn it was to play.

Miscellaneous changes

Errors in the first four turns of a game. If a player is penalized for committing a fault in one of the first four turns of the game, then the ball they played has been played into the game and is no longer an outside agency. However, if it is replaced or left in a position in which it impedes the playing of another ball being played into the game, it may be marked and temporarily removed.

Scoring clips. When clips are used, their status depends on their location, namely:

- when attached to a hoop, any scoring clips are deemed to be part of the hoop and not outside agencies. (So, a hoop run would score even if the ball hit a scoring clip.); or
- when carried by or attached to a player or their clothing, a clip is part of their personal property.

Otherwise, scoring clips are outside agencies.

Five-second rule. The position occupied by a ball at the end of a turn is that in which it appears to have come to rest for a period of five seconds or, if its position needs to be tested, the position that is agreed by the players (or adjudicated by a referee, if present).

Playing when forestalled. If a player plays a stroke after the other side has justifiably forestalled play in a manner capable of conveying the request to a person with normal hearing, and before the issue is settled, the stroke is cancelled, and any balls moved by the stroke are replaced where they were before the stroke was played.

Ball leaving the court. The definition of the boundary is the same as before, i.e. the inner edge of the boundary line defines the actual boundary but, under the new rules, a ball has left the court (and become an outside agency) as soon as *any part of it* would touch a straight edge raised vertically from the boundary. Also:

- If the replacement position of a boundary ball is disputed, the player who caused the ball to leave the court is entitled to decide the position.
- Suppose a ball (which is not an outside agency) is near the boundary and prevents a boundary ball from being placed touching the boundary where it left the court. The boundary ball can be placed touching the boundary on *either* side of the other ball, as its owner chooses.
- A rule has been added which makes it clear that a stroke is played even if a boundary ball is played (accidentally or not) in such a way that it immediately goes out of bounds.

Offside balls. A ball is not an offside ball if it reached its final position as a result of contact between it and a ball of the opposing side at any time in the last turn in which it was played. This rule has been changed so that the exemption does not apply to the partner ball of the ball played.

Giving direction about an offside ball and changing your mind. An owner of an offside ball is entitled to ask the opponent if they wish to give a direction. The opponent is required to reply promptly. A side that has given a direction or stated that no direction will be given is not permitted to change its decision.

The new rules also state that “*A ball that is directed to be played from a penalty spot becomes an outside agency and cannot become an offside ball again until it is next played. If an offside ball is not so directed, it may become an offside ball if another point is scored before it is played again*”. This is not a change, but it is stated explicitly because some players were confused by the phrasing in the old rule.

Requiring an offside ball to be replayed. Under the new rules, the opponent can require an *offside ball* to be replayed if it was played before direction was given or played from the wrong spot after direction was clearly given (provided that the opponent’s side has not played a stroke since the hoop was run). This is like the old rule except for two important differences:

- If the opponent wants an offside ball to be replayed, it must be played from a penalty spot. The opponent cannot require it to be replayed from where it was just played before.
- A side which owns an offside ball is allowed to play their onside partner ball (provided it was that ball’s turn to play) before a direction is given in relation to their offside ball. Although the opponent cannot require the onside ball to be replayed, the side that owns it has lost the right to direct any offside ball to a penalty spot.

Information requested by an opponent. If asked *and able to do so*, a player is to inform an opponent “*about the Rules relating to any matter and anything relating to the state of the game*”. This includes everything required by the old rules, and more.

Behaviour. The rule name has changed from “Etiquette” to “Behaviour”. Under the new rules, a referee may give a more severe penalty than a warning straight away. Also, the list of examples of unacceptable behaviour has been changed as follows:

- “knowingly or repeatedly plays the partner ball” is now part of a wider set of rules related to interference, wrong ball play and faults.
- Failing to reply promptly to a request for direction about an offside ball has been added.
- “Deliberately” precedes “provides wrong information”.
- “smokes or drinks alcohol during a game” has been omitted.

Timed games. In tournament and match play, if a time limit is applied to two games played simultaneously on the same court, the organising body will be allowed to direct that the timer of one game is to be stopped if play is held up by the other game.

Other changes

Other minor changes include

- There will be a smaller tolerance on how far hoops and pegs may be displaced.
- The rule about exchanging a mallet during a game requires that the reason for allowing an exchange “*occurred or was discovered during the game*”, and “*a mechanical or structural fault*” is added as an extra reason.
- All turns (except the first in a game) begin when the previous turn ends.
- There is no remedy if a ball is incorrectly positioned when a stroke is played.
- A fault is to be declared if the player (or a referee or other observer requested to watch the stroke) believes that it is more likely than not that the relevant event occurred. In other words, the principle that the benefit of the doubt should go to the striker does *not* apply.
- There is a rule which gives guidelines about when a fault can be declared even if the mallet struck a ball that was in contact with another ball before the stroke was played.
- A player is to warn the other side before playing a forceful stroke if a ball may travel towards them. It’s interesting that only the opponent’s need to be warned.
- When the players of a side have the same handicap, and both will receive extra turns, they must *announce* before the game starts which of them will receive the extra turns based on the lower handicap (of the players from the other side).