

The new Golf Croquet Rules

The World Croquet Federation released the new 5th edition of the Golf Croquet Rules in July. Several changes have been made as a result of the consultation process to the draft released in March, especially to the wrong ball rule. The new Rules are immediately effective for WCF events. For Australian competition they will come into force on 1st January 2019.

Links to the new rules and some supporting documents can be found on the WCF website at <http://www.worldcroquet.org.uk/index.php/croquet-information/golf-croquet>.

This article is aimed at those who have a fair knowledge of the current rules and describes the main changes to the rules from the 4th edition of the Rules. The two biggest changes are in the definition of faults and the way wrong ball play is handled.

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”. This is achieved by changing the definition of the striking period, as described below, to include the period when most non-striking faults occurred. Unlike striking faults which could only be committed by the striker playing the striker’s ball, faults under the new rule can be committed by any player playing or apparently intending to play any ball.

The penalty for a fault is similar to what it used to be for a striking fault. Most actions that were non-striking faults will now be treated as faults. Some situations that were non-striking faults will now be dealt with under a new rule on “Interference by a Player” instead. For those situations there is no penalty: stationary balls are replaced, moving balls affected are placed where they would have finished without the interference, and there is no loss of turn.

Fault or interference.

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.

Striking period.

Under the new rules, “*the striking period starts when a player takes a stance with apparent intent to play a stroke*”. It starts earlier than in the old rules and applies to any player who apparently intends to play any 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 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.

The turn and strokes.

To avoid the problem of the striking period starting before the turn has begun, a turn is now defined to begin when the previous turn ends. A “stroke” has a clearer and broader definition. It can be a valid shot or a wrong ball or a fault. It can even be a wrong ball and a fault at the same time. The stroke is considered to have been played with the ball the player intended to play regardless of whether contact with that ball was first or second, or even if there was no contact. There are rules covering fault and wrong ball in the same stroke, and rules covering interference and fault or wrong ball in the same stroke.

Removed from the list of faults.

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 are no longer faults. Playing a stroke before the previous turn has ended is no longer a fault, but it will be penalized under a new rule called “Overlapping Play”.

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*”, provided they did not commit a fault.

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. There is no additional penalty for committing more than one fault in a stroke. The limit of claims for a fault has changed slightly. There is still no remedy if the non-offending side has played a stroke, valid or invalid, but there is also no remedy under certain circumstances if the offending side has played a stroke, e.g. after replaying a stroke that was required by the rules, or after an extra stroke in a handicap game.

Interference of a ball by a player.

As part of the change to dealing with faults, a rule has been introduced that covers interference with a ball 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 during the striking period when playing or intending to play a stroke, a player interferes with a ball when they move, shake or touch the ball 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 mention when describing scoring clips in the rule covering “Accessories”.

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

- the ball 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, provided the position of the ball, when replaced where it would have left the court will have no tactical significance.

Other important changes to the Interference rule.

- 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, nor 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

For the most common situation where the striker has played his partner ball in singles, the non-offender can choose to replace-and-replay (the only remedy under the old rules) or to apply a *ball swap*. The non-offender also has this choice if the striker’s partner has played his own ball in doubles. In both cases, the striker’s side has played a ball that they own, but the ball was played out of sequence.

Ball swap.

With the ball swap option, the last stroke is treated as valid except that the positions of the ball played in the last stroke and its partner ball are swapped. Any points scored in the last stroke are counted for the owners of the balls that scored the point. The non-offending side then plays the ball next in sequence after the ball that should have been played.

Wrong ball situations where replace and replay only applies.

If the striker's partner played the striker's ball, or if the striker's side plays an opponent's ball, then replace-and-replay applies (no option). What was often referred to as the "full penalty" no longer applies for these offences.

Status of earlier strokes.

Except for the "Special situations" mentioned below, when play is stopped after a wrong ball, all strokes before the last stroke are treated as valid and points scored count for the owners of the balls that scored the points.

Special wrong ball play situations.

There are separate rules for what are called "Special situations":

Accidental contact when intending to strike another ball. This is not a new rule except that it no longer refers specifically to the striker's ball but to any ball the player intended to strike.

Exchange of colours in first four strokes of a game. This was an Official Ruling.

Wrong ball played in first four strokes of a game. This was an Official Ruling.

Previous stroke played with opponent ball. If an opponent's ball was played in the previous stroke but was not noticed until another stroke was played by the other side, then any points scored in the last two strokes are cancelled and there is a penalty area continuation. This is subject to the rule above. The "penalty area continuation" is explained below

Same side played successive strokes. If the same side played the last two or more strokes, then a wrong ball has been played in the last stroke unless it was allowed to be played by the rules. If a wrong ball has been played in this situation, then no points are scored for any ball as a result of any stroke played by the offending side after its last valid stroke, the non-offending side chooses whether the balls are left where they stopped or are all replaced in the positions they occupied before any invalid stroke played by the offending side, and the non-offending side then plays either ball of their side.

Wrong ball and fault in same stroke. If a wrong ball is played and a fault is committed in the last stroke, the wrong ball is ignored, and the Fault rule applies. Play continues by the non-offending side playing the ball next in sequence after the ball that should have been played in the last stroke. This is subject to the rules applying to the last three special situations above.

Penalty area continuation.

One-yard semi-circular *penalty areas* replace the penalty spots in the old rules. A *penalty area continuation* is where all four balls are to be next played from the same penalty area. The sides decide the order of play by tossing a coin or by an equivalent procedure. The losing side chooses from which penalty area the balls shall be played. Play then continues by the winning side playing a stroke with either ball of their side from the chosen penalty area.

A penalty area continuation is used for the offside rule as well as when a hoop has been run out of order and for one of the "Special situations" in wrong ball play listed above.

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 moved.

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.
- 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.

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.

Communication of decisions.

The rules now specify the obligations of the two sides to communicate decisions and to respond promptly to requests for information or decisions in relation to:

- offside ball directions;
- whether Replace and Replay or Ball Swap will apply;
- whether balls are to be replaced after a fault;
- the state of the game; and
- whether an extra stroke will be played in a handicap game.

Decisions must be announced promptly and, except with regard to extra strokes, a decision cannot be changed once it has been announced. A player who indicates an intention to play an extra stroke may revoke that decision at any time before playing the extra stroke (subject to the rule covering an extra stroke after a fault).

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, a scoring clip is not an outside agency. So, a hoop run would score even if the ball hit such a scoring clip.
- An outside agency when falling to or lying on the court surface.
- When attached to a player or their clothing, a scoring clip is part of their personal property.

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.

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 as required by the rules has been added.
- “provides wrong information to an opponent” has been omitted”. (Covered by another rule.)
- “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

- 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.
- No remedy if a ball (except outside agency) 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.
- 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).

It may take us a while to get used to the new rules, but I think that they are a big improvement on the previous ones. The fact that new rules are longer is mainly because many reasonably common situations were not covered in the old rules or were ambiguous. The new rules are generally fairer and clearer.

John van der Touw
gcreferees@croquetvic.asn.au
30 July 2018