

# THE TRIAL RULES FOR 1961: HOW THEY WERE DEVELOPED

By  
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In view of questions raised about trial changes in the Rules of Golf for 1961, it is well to review the considerations which led the USGA Executive Committee to adopt the changes.

In formulating rules, first consideration must be given the basic integrity of the game. Will a proposed rule promote fair play among all golfers?—that is, for the game of golf in its entirety? Special weight cannot be given to tournament players, or week-end golfers, or any other class. Obviously, the Rules cannot please each one in every situation. The broad best interests of the game must motivate the rules-makers.

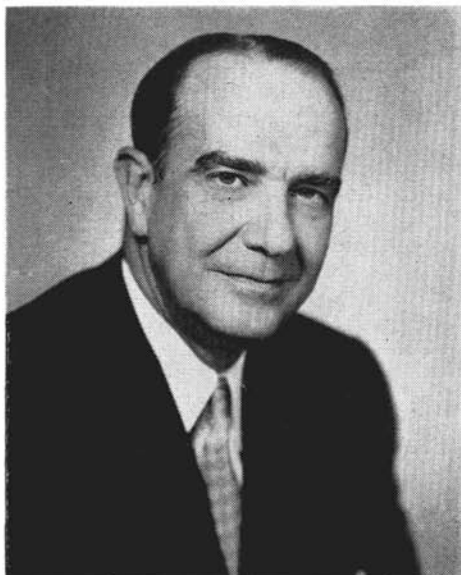
Uniformity is highly desirable. When a man from the East plays in the West, he should play the same game and not be obliged to inquire about rules (except any local rules to cover unique conditions on a particular course). Thus, a world-wide code was developed by a joint British-American committee in 1951; it was revised jointly in 1955 and 1959. The USGA's divergences in 1960-61 have been experimental.

## Unplayable: In Water Hazard and Outside

The USGA for some time has sought means to minimize penalties for the common errors—balls out of bounds, lost, unplayable, and in water hazards. There is a sameness among these four situations—the ball is made unplayable in one way or another; the fault is the player's, and relief without penalty is out of the question. Logically, the penalties and procedures should be similar.

A suitable base from which to consider these four situations was the water hazard rule. It had proven fair and workable over many years with its two optional methods of relief, allowing for playing a ball, under penalty of one stroke, either:

- (a) Behind the water hazard (or within two club-lengths of a



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lateral water hazard margin);

— or —

- (b) At the place where the original ball was played (stroke and distance).

It seemed reasonable to give the same relief for a ball unplayable elsewhere than in a water hazard. Therefore, a trial Rule last year brought this into the USGA code (independent of the British). It seems to have worked well and is being tried again in 1961.

So far so good—similar rules for balls unplayable both in and out of water hazards.

## Lost Ball

Precisely this kind of formula could not be applied to a lost ball. Since its position is unknown, there can be no fixing of a control point behind which to drop

## Main Rules Changes For 1961

### Definition

- 6 **BALL LOST:** May be declared lost by player without searching five minutes.

### Rules

- 29-1 **BALL LOST:** Penalty increased to stroke and distance.

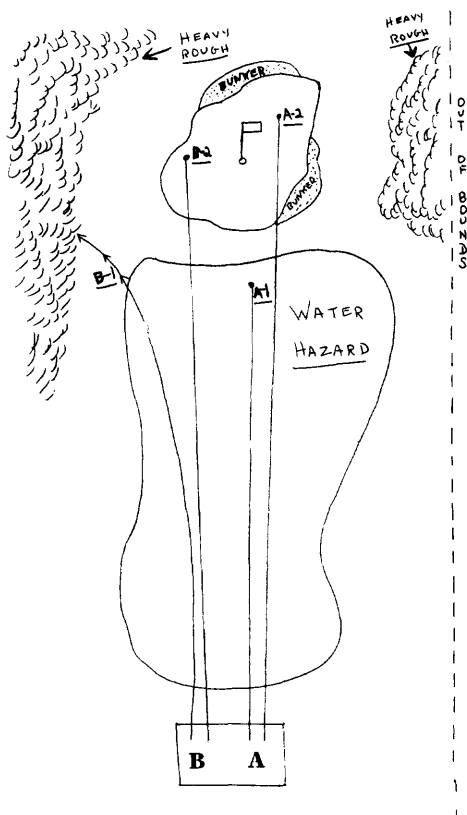
- 29-1 **BALL OUT OF BOUNDS:** Penalty increased to stroke and distance.

**Exception:** Under certain conditions clubs may, by Local Rule, also provide for dropping a ball, under penalty of one stroke, within two club-lengths of place where ball last crossed boundary line.

- 29-2 **BALL UNPLAYABLE:** Additional option permits dropping a ball within two club-lengths of point where ball lay, under penalty of one stroke. If the ball lay in a bunker, a ball must be dropped in the bunker.

\* \* \*

**PROVISIONAL BALL:** As in 1960, a provisional ball may be played only for a ball which may be lost or out of bounds (Rule 30).



a ball. The traditional relief for a lost ball is the only one possible—that is, a return to the place from which the original ball was played.

Still, in 1960 an attempt was made to bring the penalty more nearly into line with the penalty for a ball unplayable or in a water hazard through a trial Rule providing for loss of distance only.

But it became apparent that a distance-only penalty for a lost ball was unsound and inadequate, as the following typical case shows:

**Situation:** A par 3 hole of 180 yards. A water hazard between tee and green. Severe rough on the left past the water and past the green. Out of bounds on the right. Fairly severe rough between the green and out of bounds.

A and B are playing a match. A's ball is short, in the water. When it is his turn, he plays his next shot,

under penalty of one stroke, from the tee onto the green, 25 feet from the hole, and lies 3.

B hooks from the tee into the severe left rough. Thinking his ball may be lost, B plays a provisional ball from the tee onto the green, also about 25 feet from the hole. B rather hopes he may not find his first ball, as he would have to make a superlative recovery with it to be as well off as he is with his provisional ball, which would lie 2 under a penalty of distance only for a lost ball. It is to A's interest that B's first ball be found, so he helps search for it. B searches five minutes and does not find his ball, so his provisional ball is in play, lying 2.

Both take two putts. A has a 5. B has a 4 and wins the hole with the provisional ball.

Obviously loss of distance only for B's lost ball was inadequate. Any rule is unsound that makes it to the advantage of the opponent, rather than the player, to find the player's ball or that can put a premium on lax conduct.

Consequently for 1961, there is a return to stroke and distance for a lost ball.

### Out of Bounds

The case of a ball out of bounds is the nub of the matter. Historically, an out-of-bounds ball has been equated with a lost ball. There has been a single relief procedure for both—a return to the place where the last stroke was played.

Now if the lost-ball penalty must be increased to stroke and distance, so must the out-of-bounds penalty. Distance only would give rise to inconsistency. Two examples:

1. On the par-3 hole described above, B hits his first shot out of bounds. Under a distance-only penalty, he plays his next shot from the tee onto the green, scores 4, and wins the hole from A even though he (B) played a worse original tee shot.

2. In the 1947 National Open Championship, when a ball out of bounds cost distance only and a lost ball cost stroke and distance, there was a hard problem of decision on a ball never found after it had been struck toward a boundary. "Reasonable evidence" indicated that the ball could have been out of bounds, but there was no absolute certainty. The player was given the benefit of the doubt. But what a needlessly hard decision to have to make in trying to be fair to the field as well as to the individual player! Suppose the National Open had depended

on it—or the fifth flight of the club championship.

Thus, stroke and distance should be the basic penalty for both a lost ball and a ball out of bounds. Still, the USGA sought a means of fairly and sensibly minimizing the out-of-bounds penalty: after all, there is a relatively high incidence of balls out of bounds, and none of us likes stroke-and-distance if there is a sound way to avoid it.

This has led to a new treatment of the dilemma for trial in 1961. The basic out-of-bounds Rule remains tied to the lost-ball Rule, but, by an optional Local Rule, it may now be related also to the lateral water hazard concept for the first time.

Thus, if a course meets the conditions set for the Local Rule, the club may allow a ball to be dropped within two club-lengths of the place where the original ball last crossed the boundary, under penalty of one stroke, provided the place of crossing can be determined in fact.

This, it is hoped, can achieve the following:

1. A fair penalty, preserving the distance but requiring play from the general area where the faulty stroke ended—as is true of a ball unplayable or in a water hazard.

2. A time-saving procedure, eliminating need for the play of another ball.

3. Support of the principle that like situations should be treated as nearly alike as is feasible.

### The 1961 Trial Rules in Summary

The following summary of the main provisions of the 1961 Rules shows their relative consistency:

Options	Ball Lost	Ball Out of Bounds	Ball Unplayable	Ball In Water Hazard
1.	Stroke and distance.	Stroke and distance. —or—	Stroke and distance. —or—	Stroke and distance. —or—
2.	(none)	If club adopts Local Rule: Drop within 2 club-lengths of last place of crossing boundary. Penalty—1 stroke.	Drop behind or within 2 club-lengths of place where ball lay. Penalty — 1 stroke.	Drop behind, or, in case of lateral hazard, within 2 club-lengths of last point of crossing hazard margin. Penalty —1 stroke.

## The Fruits of Experiments

The USGA's experiments in 1960 removed the long-standing inconsistency between two strokes for a drop behind an unplayable lie and one stroke for relief from a water hazard. Both now are one stroke in the USGA code. Further improvement may come from the out-of-bounds experiment.

Frequent Rules changes, especially on a trial basis, are generally undesirable. But an open mind and a willingness to venture into new areas can be productive in any activity. Not so long ago the Rules did not recognize lateral water hazards; now they receive special treatment in the Rules. The 14-club Rule was not introduced until 1938; it is now a fundamental. The abolition of the stymie was an outgrowth of various experiments. The putting green traditionally was "all

ground, except hazards, within 20 yards of the hole;" only in late years has it been defined as ground "specially prepared for putting." We must be willing to try new approaches.

Of course, there will be other views of the trial Rules for 1961. We urge that they be considered thoughtfully and given a fair trial. If there is to be criticism, let it be constructive—with remedial suggestions based on the best interests of the game and not simply personal preference for lighter penalties. Piecemeal "remedies" can impair the integrity of the Rules, for there does exist and must exist an interrelation among the entire code of Rules.

The USGA, in its efforts to serve the game, bespeaks the good will and the cooperation of all golfers who want a fair code—and that means all golfers.

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Sterling G. Slaphey  
Managing Editor

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of September, 1960.

John M. Koser, Jr.  
(My commission expires Feb. 21, 1961)