

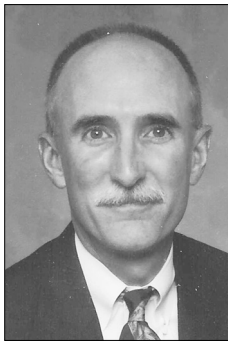
Inside the ropes: Rules of golf changes; Laser rangefinders allowed

BY CARR McCALLA

Just when you thought you'd grasped the changes to the Rules of Golf that went into effect in 2004, here come some more. The USGA and the R&A both have Rules of Golf Committees that typically meet on a quarterly basis. Then, once a year the two committees get together to compare notes and continue the orderly process of advancing any revisions to the rules that they can agree on. This process has been in place for many years and has produced the rules we have today. The Rules operate on a four-year cycle. In essence this means that the Rules of Golf (the small rules book you probably carry around in your golf bag) will not be altered except every four years. The Decisions on the Rules of Golf (a thesaurus looking book that you may have seen in your golf professional's office), however, operate on a two-year cycle and consequently, while the Rule Book cannot reflect any changes for a four-year period, the committees do add, delete, and revise decisions on the rules every two years.

The USGA and R&A have recently announced 111 changes to the Decisions on the Rules to go into effect Jan. 1, 2006. Thirty-seven new decisions, 66 revised decisions, and eight decisions that will be deleted make up the changes for 2006. Perhaps the most noteworthy, and newsworthy, of the new decisions is the governing bodies' sanction of the use of distance-measuring devices, including laser rangefinders and GPS systems. New Decision 14-3/0.5 allows a committee to permit the use of distance-measuring devices by Local Rule. This applies to devices that measure distance only, not any other conditions that might affect a player's play (e.g., wind or gradient). In the absence of such a Local Rule, the use of a distance measuring device remains contrary to the Rules. What does this mean for you? Basically, if you compete in an event in which the Committee has elected to include, in the Conditions of Competition, the Local Rule allowing use of these devices, you may use them in the competition. It's as simple as that. However, if the Local Rule is not in effect, the penalty for their use is disqualification.

I just returned from our annual conference of the International Association of Golf Administrators (IAGA), and interestingly, 75 percent of the organizations represented there, which include almost all of the state, regional, and provincial golf associations in North America, have tentatively decided to utilize the Local Rule allowing use of distance measuring devices in at least some of their Championships in 2006. The LGA's Board of Directors will be contemplating our position on this issue in the coming weeks and



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will soon announce whether we will utilize the Local Rule in LGA events in the coming year. It is apparent that acceptance of these devices by traditionalists is becoming more prevalent and there's no question that trend will continue. Whether we sanction the use of these devices in LGA events or not, our feeling is that the vast majority of local events, i.e., club championships, members-guests, etc., in all likelihood will utilize the Local Rule allowing their use. The use of distance measuring devices has been allowed by the USGA Handicap System for the last number of years with respect to the posting of scores for handicapping purposes. With the additional perception of legality created by this decision change, I think you'll begin to see more and more of these devices on courses in Louisiana.

If you're a 'rules junkie' and would like to learn more about the changes to the Decisions book for 2006, visit our website at www.LGAgolf.org, then click on the USGA logo, then 'Rules' to see a listing of all 111 changes for 2006.

NEW COURSE ADDED TO AUDUBON GOLF TRAIL

The Atchafalaya Golf Club at Idlewild in Patterson is the newest addition to the Audubon Golf Trail. This Robert Van Hage designed course between Lafayette and Houma, has just opened within the last couple of months to rave reviews. The Atchafalaya Golf Course becomes the 11th course under the Audubon Golf Trail banner and joins Calvert Crossing (Monroe), Olde Oaks (Shreveport), Cypress Bend (Toledo Bend), OakWing (Alexandria), Tamahka Trails (Marksville), Gray Plantation (Lake Charles), The Island (Plaquemine), Carter Plantation (Springfield), The TPC of Louisiana (New Orleans) and Audubon Golf Club (New Orleans) as Trail courses. Matt Goldsmith, formerly at Pelican Point Golf Club in Gonzales, is the Director of Golf at Atchafalaya GC and I'm sure would welcome your visit to his new facility.

As we mentioned in last month's edition of Inside the Ropes, we had hoped to have a couple of exciting announcements regarding additional benefits of membership in the Louisiana Golf Association; however, we still have a few details to finalize so it may be another column or two before we can announce the specifics. Our hope is to have the Audubon Golf Trail be a significant part of the value-added benefits of LGA membership. Hopefully that may pique your interest! If your club is not currently a member of the LGA and you'd like to have more information on becoming one, please contact our office at 337.265.3938.

See you next month.....Inside the Ropes!

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