

Rationale for the 5th Edition of the WCF rules of Golf Croquet

2018

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Introduction

Golf Croquet has been described as a simple game with simple rules. However, there is a saying, sometimes attributed to Albert Einstein, that “everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler”.

The 4th Edition Rules, introduced in 2013, can fairly be said to have been too simple. They are silent on some significant matters and ambiguous or even contradictory on others.

During 2016, the GC Rules Committee of the (English) Croquet Association developed a new draft of the Rules and the GCRC picked this up in early 2017 for consideration as a basis for the next edition. This version was concerned with redrafting the rules for clarity and completeness, and not with making changes to how the game is played.

The GCRC decided to work with that draft and the new 5th Edition is a direct descendant of it. However, the new Rules have deviated further from the original intent of a simple redrafting than was originally envisaged, but this has been a natural consequence of dealing with the issues that appeared during the GCRC’s work.

One factor that has influenced the GCRC’s work is the requirement imposed by the WCF Statutes that “common wording” should be developed “where the GC Rules and the AC Laws cover similar subject matter which does not relate to the essential differences between the two games.”

Summary of Significant Changes

Wrong Ball Rule

The treatment of wrong ball play was considered as part of the rules review. The 4th Edition rule (which was essentially similar to the 3rd Edition rule introduced in 2008) has been generally regarded as preferable to the 2nd Edition rule (introduced in 2005) where all wrong ball play was heavily penalised.

However, by having different consequences for different wrong ball events, the current wrong ball rule was more complex than the 2nd Edition rule and there had been many complaints over the years about the difficulty that some players had in understanding the current rule.

There was also a serious issue with the fact that the application of the current rule when play was found to have gone out of sequence could give rise to “gift hoops”. This arises because of the mandatory nature of the Replace and Replay remedy in the 4th Edition.

The simplest form of “gift hoop” arises when Blue and then Yellow are both played into good hoop running position and Black then follows because neither player has yet noticed that play has gone out of sequence. If play is stopped at this point, Black must be replaced and Blue will then play, probably scoring the point.

Similarly, if play is not stopped after Black is played and Red is played, and play is then stopped, Red must be replaced and Yellow will then play, probably scoring the point.

Further, if play has been out of sequence for some time, the first player to realise this will face a dilemma if their opponent has played the last stroke. If they forestall immediately, as they should, the result could be a “gift hoop” for the opponent. But, if

instead they play one more stroke themselves and then forestall, the result could be a “gift hoop” for themselves.

All such cases are unfortunate but might give rise to a suspicion in the mind of the “victim” that the last stroke was played deliberately out of sequence by their opponent to secure the “gift hoop”. This is clearly undesirable as the maintenance of cordial relations between players is important.

The GCRC felt it right to provide a solution for this problem and initially proposed that playing out of sequence should lead to a reset of play from a penalty spot. However, this did not tackle the complaint of complexity and was felt by some to be likely to interrupt a game and take more time than was desirable.

Another approach that attracted some support in the playing community is a “lookback” solution which involves determining when the first out-of-sequence ball was played, usually subject to a limit of three or four turns, and then restarting play from the last valid position with a ball swap used when that could not be determined. However, there are many who find recalling previous play accurately to be difficult and differences of opinion would be commonplace and potentially disruptive. The GCRC recognised the force of these practical objections.

A valuable comment expressed the view that a simple rule would either involve a full penalty for all wrong ball play (as in the 2nd Edition from 2005 to 2008) or would always forgive the error, replace the balls moved and play the correct ball, as is the practice in Egypt. However, the Egyptian approach requires a vigilant Referee in Charge to detect out-of-sequence play before it occurs, a luxury most WCF Members cannot afford.

The GCRC has therefore opted for something similar to the Egyptian approach but which can operate without Referees in Charge and with a new method of avoiding gift hoops.

Faults

While the treatment of striking faults remains largely unchanged, the GCRC gave attention to several surrounding issues. In the 4th Edition, a stroke can only be played by the striker by striking the striker’s ball. It follows that wrong ball play is not a stroke and this introduces complications when a fault is committed in such a non-stroke. It also leads to the weird situation of a non-stroke being treated as a stroke (so that any points apparently scored by such a non-stroke can be counted) if it is not immediately detected.

The GCRC decided to re-define a stroke as a stroke-like action by any player. It also decided to re-define a turn so that it starts as soon as the previous turn ends, and the striking period as beginning with the adoption of a stance, rather than the actual striking of a ball. These changes were intended to remove some of the timing issues when there are combinations of striking and non-striking faults.

The GCRC embarked on a detailed analysis of all possible combinations of striking faults, non-striking faults and wrong ball plays, with the intention of dealing with these in a single “multiple error” rule. It turned out that there were a large number of such cases, which, when listed, seemed intimidating.

This led to a radical change. The question was asked as to why GC has non-striking faults? Why were they not treated, as does AC, as interferences which are corrected but are not penalised? Adoption of this principle would greatly simplify the multiple error

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issue as well as conforming with the WCF mandate to avoid unnecessary differences between the AC Laws and the GC Rules. The change was therefore adopted.

What were previously called “striking faults” are now simply “faults”, and the multiple error issue is reduced to the cases of a fault and wrong ball in the same stroke or an error (fault or wrong ball) and interference in the same stroke.

The list of faults has also been slightly reduced by eliminating the two “resting” faults, which were inherited from AC, on the grounds that they do not confer an advantage to the striker in GC.

In the 4th Edition, “playing before the previous turn ends” is a striking fault under Rule 13(a)(14), which presents a logical difficulty since the early player is not yet the striker and only the striker can commit a striking fault. The 4th Edition also contains Rules (6(e) and 6(f)) which treat “simultaneous or near simultaneous” play as a non-striking fault. There are problems in defining precisely what this means and which of the various rules should apply. The 5th Edition replaces all three of these rules with a single rule for “overlapping play” which has similar consequence to the 4th Edition simultaneous play rule.

Penalty Area

It has long been suggested that some latitude should be permitted when playing a ball from a penalty spot. Given concerns about “close blocking” if two balls had to be played from the same penalty spot, the 5th Edition now permits balls to be played from anywhere within a 1-yard semi-circle centred on the penalty spots.

Penalty Area Continuation

The principle of a Penalty Area Continuation already exists in the 4th Edition as a means of restarting a game after it has been discovered that one or more hoops have been run out of order (see Rule 1(f)). Its use has been extended in the 5th Edition to provide a fair method of restarting a game after two very uncommon irregularities, namely a rare wrong ball scenario and overlapping play where both sides are in error.

Behaviour

The Etiquette rule from the 4th Edition has been renamed as “Behaviour” and strengthened, giving increased power and options to referees.

The ban on use of alcohol and tobacco has been removed, it being felt that this was properly a matter for WCF Member tournament regulations. There are other situations where the rules do not specify a penalty for a breach. The GCRC believes that the enhanced power given to referees coupled with WCF Member tournament regulations tailored to suit local culture and needs are a better way of dealing with some issues than trying to micro-manage such situations in the Rules.

The GCRC also recognises the varying traditions of spectator behavior in WCF Member countries, particularly in regard to advice. While frowning on the provision of such advice, it does not seek to ban acting on it, because the advice may well be the obvious thing to do. The 5th Edition makes one exception in relation to team events where it does not permit acting on advice from team members or officials apart from partners in doubles. This is made an example of unacceptable behaviour. Again, it leaves any consequential action to WCF Member tournament regulations.

Comment on Individual Rules

Rule 2 The Court

The boundary of the court when line marking is not clear is now defined as it is in AC.

The tolerance in hoop position has been reduced from 18" to 12". This has been agreed with the AC Laws Committee, which will increase the tolerance specified in the AC Laws from 6" to 12".

Rule 3 Equipment

Hoops

The minimum width of a hoop has been reduced from 3 ¾" to 3 11/16" to reflect modern conditions. Narrower widths are still permitted for tournament and match play. This change has been agreed with the ACLC. It is recognized that some courts are routinely set to very narrow widths, and it was suggested that no minimum greater than the actual ball width need be specified. This was decided against at a joint meeting of the ACLC and GCRC held in Palm Springs during the 2017 MacRobertson Shield.

The position of the red-topped hoop is now fixed as the final hoop.

To allow for easy change of court use between AC and GC, a court set for one code is valid for the other.

The width or height of a hoop may now be checked at any time during a game with the agreement of both sides. This is in addition to a pre-game check. It should be noted that the "jammed ball" rule also applies and has been extended to resemble AC Law 53(b)(3).

Mallets

The rule on mallet structure is slightly more forgiving in that it permits alternative but equivalent methods of attaching the head to the shaft.

The exchange of mallets rule now permits a mallet to be replaced if a mechanical or structural defect becomes apparent during the game. This includes defects that do not arise through accidental damage. Many mallets now have heads secured to the shaft by a screw or bolt and there have been cases where the mallet head has become loose and the fixing screw or bolt could not be tightened.

Rule 4 Outside agencies and accessories

Scoring Clips

These are now not outside agencies when attached to a hoop, so may safely be left in position while the hoop is being run. However, either side can also insist on their removal before a stroke is played. Clips remain outside agencies when on the ground or while falling from a player or a player's clothing.

Rule 5 The Start

The only change made is to clarify that each player must retain the same ball throughout a multi-game match, which was not entirely clear in the 4th Edition. It was considered whether to allow changes of balls between games but there was no consensus in favour of this.

Other ideas included various ways of starting the game to nullify a perceived advantage to the side playing first. However, the GCRC was informed that research showed no significant advantage existed and so no change was considered necessary.

In general, the GCRC was reluctant to make any change that would make the rules more complicated.

Rule 6 The Turn, Striking Period and Stroke

The GCRC spent considerable time developing precise definitions of these terms and ensuring that their use was consistent throughout the Rules.

An important change from the 4th Edition is that there is now no gap between turns, one starting as soon as the previous one ends. Having a gap had some advantages, allowing time for decisions about offside balls, extra strokes, etc., but it also caused difficulties. Some of these were associated with the precise order of events, for example, the striker's doubles partner touching a ball before or after the striker hit the striker's ball affected which turn was lost. The discontinuation of non-striking faults in the 5th Edition removes some of these problems. Even so, the change is an improvement. It allows for a striking period to begin before the ball is hit, which avoids timing difficulties if another ball is touched at about the same time as the striker's ball.

A stroke may now be played by any player, not just the striker. This is a definitional change, not an indication of permission. This allows a wrong ball and a fault to occur at the same time, an event which in the 4th Edition required awkward wording since wrong ball play was not a stroke and could not therefore be a fault.

An important change, if not particularly major in practice, is that a stroke may now be declared to have been played (or "deemed"), thus avoiding the pantomime of a gentle tap on the top of a ball with the intent of playing a stroke without causing the ball to move. This had the added problem that some referees considered that this action was almost always a fault and would warn players that any repetition might lead to serious consequences such as loss of a point.

The striking period is now defined as starting when a player, with the apparent intent of playing a stroke, takes up a stance. It can be argued that a player's intent cannot be known by others but the act of taking a stance by a player entitled to play the next stroke should make it obvious enough that the player has formed the necessary intent. From then on, any accidental contact with a ball, usually when casting over the ball, will count as a stroke or a fault. This reflects the policy in the 4th Edition which remains less forgiving than the AC approach to such contacts which is driven by the much greater significance of changes of the innings in AC.

If a stance is broken and then resumed, the striking period is interrupted and, provided the stance is quit under control, ends. The earlier part is annulled and a new striking period begins when a new stance is taken. This does not permit the avoidance of a fault that has already been committed or one committed in the process of stepping away from the stance.

As before, a turn ends when balls have come to rest or left the court. The principle of the AC 5-second rule has been introduced in order to help resolve questions about where balls come to rest. Leaving the court is now defined by the edge of the ball crossing the boundary, as is also the case in AC. The GCRC believe that this is easier to determine

than using the centre of the ball, particularly when the ball approaches the line at a shallow angle.

Rule 6.7 now makes it clear that a ball touching the boundary must be played into the court. It is not possible to cut another ball that is marginally inside the boundary into the court because that would necessitate the striker's ball going out of court.

Rule 7 Scoring a Point

This has been reworded, but is unchanged in intent. The sub-rule dealing with a ball jamming in a hoop is now located in Rule 9.5 (Interference by defective equipment) and has been extended to prevent replays when there was no attempt to make the jammed ball run the hoop or when a fault was committed in the stroke, except when the fault was only committed because the equipment was defective.

Rule 7.5 now covers hoops run out-of-order, and states that any time lost before a reset is not restored, but any extra strokes played are restored.

Rule 8 Offside balls

The rule has been amended to allow the owner of one onside and one offside ball to play the onside ball before the opponent has given a direction about the offside ball.

A clarification has been made to the exceptions. "As a result of contact with an opponent ball" left some uncertainty. Did that have to be the last contact made, or did any contact count? For example, if a ball, after contact with an opponent ball, touched its partner ball, could it be said to have reached its position as a result of contact with an opponent ball, when without the final contact with its partner, it would have reached a different position?

The new rule says that the contact may occur at any time in the last turn in which the ball moves, which it is hoped covers all plausible cases.

The rule now permits the owner of an offside ball to ask if it is to be sent to a penalty area, thus avoiding a potential impasse where the opponent has not issued a direction and the owner does not want to play without a direction being given either because the opponent may not have noticed the position, or because of the penalty that could be incurred. The opponent is required to reply promptly and may not change their decision once announced.

Rule 9 Interference

Interference with a ball by a player

The most significant change is that accidental actions which were non-striking faults are now generally treated as interferences, and there are no penalties. Deliberate interference with a ball by a player is an offence under the Behaviour rule except in certain defined circumstances. A new such circumstance is that it is now permitted to field a ball that is clearly going to go out shortly before it does so, provided there is no tactical significance related to its actual exit point.

Interference with a ball by an outside agency

The rule now says that if an error occurred in a stroke in which there was interference by an outside agency, the error is dealt with first, and the interference only considered if the balls were not replaced after the error.

It should be noted that scoring clips, when attached to a hoop, are no longer outside agencies, so are not mentioned here. This applies to any clips, including those from a double-banked game. The ACLC intend to modify the AC Laws to be compatible with this.

Interference by the court surface

Rabbit runs may now be repaired, although this was disallowed by the commentary to the 4th Edition Rules. A minor change of wording related to this is that “...nor is a consequence of ball damage” is replaced by “...nor a result of a ball being hit into the court surface”.

Interference by defective equipment

This rule effectively adopts the corresponding AC Law 53(b)(3). Although that rule is still optional in AC, it always applies in WCF AC events and there is sufficient experience with it to justify its adoption here.

Rule 10 Playing a Wrong Ball

The Rule has been re-organised with simplicity of application as the main aim. Rule 10.1 defines a wrong ball and when play should be forestalled – both before a wrong ball is played and, if that is not done, immediately afterwards. The GCRC agrees that prevention is better than cure and that early forestalling is very desirable.

Rule 10.2 confirms that all strokes earlier than the last stroke before play is stopped are valid and any points scored in them are counted. Rule 10.3 deals with the most common forms of wrong ball, namely the “out-of-sequence” cases and playing an opponent’s ball. Rule 10.4 described the two remedies that can apply in Rule 10.3 cases. Rules 10.5 to 10.7 deal with special situations that occur only rarely but still need to be covered.

Rule 10.3 provides a short and simple checklist so that the reader can quickly identify which remedy applies to the most common forms of wrong ball. The standard remedy is “Replace and Replay” which is the same remedy as in the 4th Edition.

However, in order to deal with the “gift hoop” issue, Replace and Replay is no longer mandatory when either the striker plays the partner ball or the striker’s partner plays their own ball at the wrong time. In these cases only, the non-offending side has an option – they can either choose to apply Replace and Replay, so that the offending side replays the stroke with the correct ball, or to apply Ball Swap.

Ball Swap means deeming the last stroke to have been valid, but with an important adjustment, so that the non-offending side will play the next stroke. The important adjustment is that the wrong ball is swapped with its partner ball (which was the striker’s ball that should have been played in the last stroke). The existence of this option solves the main form of the “gift hoop” problem. Hence, if play goes Bab Blue, Ray Yellow, play stopped and Ball Swap is chosen by Bab, Yellow and Red will be swapped and Bab will then play Black.

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The other important change to underline is that if the last stroke was played with an opponent ball, the remedy is Replace and Replay instead of the “full penalty” in the 4th Edition. This change is consistent with the desire to move away from a punitive approach and, instead, simply to restore the game to its proper sequence. The absence of a penalty will also encourage early forestalling so that such cases should become less common.

Rule 10.5 covers some unusual situations, including the rare case when a side plays an opponent’s ball but this is not noticed before the opponent plays a stroke. Whichever ball is then played is necessarily a wrong ball, either because it does not follow in sequence or it does not belong to the opponent. The 4th Edition condones the errors and establishes a new sequence which does not work if the last stroke was also played with an opponent ball. The 5th Edition instead cancels the last two strokes and requires a Penalty Area Continuation.

Rule 10.6 deals with the rare but possible case of one side playing two (or more) strokes in succession. It prevents a side from condoning its own wrong ball play. Rule 10.7 deals with another rare case of when a fault is committed in a stroke in which a wrong ball is played.

Rule 11 Faults

Faults are known in the 4th Edition as Striking Faults. There are only minor changes at this time, although a full review of faults jointly with the ACLC may be expected.

The changes to the list of faults are the dropping of the two “resting” faults, which are seen to give no advantage to the striker in GC, being largely associated with making very hampered strokes in AC. The fault of touching the head of the mallet is now limited in time to the forward swing in which the stroke is played. This recognises that such touching after the swing is completed gives the player no advantage and is consistent with the AC approach.

The 4th Edition was silent on the criterion or “standard of proof” for judging faults. Was it the criminal law’s “beyond reasonable doubt” or the civil law’s “on the balance of probabilities”? A statement was needed to clear up any disagreements, and it was decided to be consistent with AC and use the balance of probabilities, which AC has used for several years. It is hoped that referees will be more comfortable with making difficult decisions with this standard of proof.

If a fault causes an opponent ball to run the hoop in order, and the opponent decides not to replace the balls, the hoop point now counts. Previously, when no points could be scored, if the balls were not replaced, the opposition ball could be left in a difficult position, but if they were replaced, the side that committed the fault could get a second attempt at the hoop. Worse still, the 4th Edition rule created an incentive to admit a fault for a striker whose jump shot had carried an opponent ball through the hoop.

Rule 12 Overlapping Play

This rule combines the elements of the 4th Edition Rule 13(a)(14) striking fault rule and Rules 6(e) and (f), the “simultaneous play” rules. The consequences are similar to the 4th Edition rules, which treated the error as a non-striking fault, in that declaring a stroke is equivalent to missing a turn. There is a rare possibility that the striker’s side might also

commit an error in their stroke. In this case, both sides are in error and a Penalty Area Continuation is a fitting remedy.

Rule 13 Playing after play has been forestalled

This remains an example of misbehaviour, as in the 4th Edition, but the rule now states what is to happen to play after the opponent has justifiably forestalled.

Rule 14 Advice

Advice from outside the court is a contentious issue and attitudes vary between WCF Members. There are limits on the sanctions that can be imposed on spectators, and the rules can do no more than to discourage.

An exception is in team events where the team management should exercise control over their members. Rule 14.4 now states that players may not act on tactical advice from off the court if it is given by a team member or official. Contravening any part of Rule 14 is an example of misbehaviour under Rule 16.2.2 and can be penalised by a referee under Rule 16.4 or 16.5. This applies to acting on “team tactical advice” as prohibited by Rule 14.4 but, if further sanctions are felt necessary, this should be dealt with in national or local tournament regulations.

Rule 15 Refereeing

There is nothing new in this rule.

Rule 16 Behaviour

There is some change to the list of unacceptable behaviours. Rule 16.2.2 now covers any breach of Rule 14. The prohibition on “knowingly or repeatedly playing the partner ball” is extended to other similar actions. Failure to make a choice or decision promptly when asked is now included. However, the ban on smoking or drinking is deleted and the matter is left to local regulations.

The 1-minute rule is replaced by a more general approach, and it is left to the tournament authorities to decide whether to apply it. However, referees now have greater powers to deal with examples of serious time-wasting.

Powers of a referee are extended so that serious offences can be penalised without waiting for a third occurrence. It is advised that WCF Member tournament regulations should include appropriate appeal procedures.

Rule 17 Double-Banked Games

This contains only provisions that are already customary.

Rule 18 Penalty Area and Penalty Area Continuation

The penalty spots D and E on the East and West boundaries are replaced by Penalty Areas which are semicircles of radius 1 yard centred on the points.

The principle behind Penalty Area Continuation is already present in the 4th Edition in connection with restarting the game after one or more hoops have been run out of order. It has been extended to two further unusual situations, namely (1) in overlapping

play where both sides are in error and (2) when a side has played a wrong ball because the previous turn was played by the other side with an opponent's ball.

Rule 19 Handicap Play

This spells out the method of calculation for allocating extra strokes, which may differ from that in effect in the domains of some WCF Members.

The rule defines a protocol for sides to communicate their intentions. Of note is the requirement that a side that is contemplating using an extra turn must say so without delay. If they do not, the opponents may ask, and are entitled to a prompt reply.

Extra strokes may now be used after a wrong ball, provided the Replace and Replay option is taken by the opponent.

If an extra stroke is taken after a fault, the balls must be replaced and there is no longer an option for them to be left where they stopped.

While this rule defines the number of extra strokes to be given, it does not cover the setting and changing of handicaps. These are matters for each WCF Member

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