

The Rules of the Game

In this month's installment, we take a look back, not at the way WE were, but at the way GOLF was—in 1744!

Having established a format for golf's first official event at Leith Links, the Gentlemen Golfers of Edinburgh set out to formalize the rules of play. These were produced under the heading "Articles and Laws in Playing Golf (The Rules of the Gentlemen Golfers 1744)." While modern rules number 41 with 36 definitions and more than 300 subsections, the Gentlemen Golfers were satisfied with brevity—13 rules, one sentence apiece. Imagine being a rules official under those circumstances!

Here, then, are the first known written rules for the game we enjoy and nurture. (Note: Original spellings are used.)

1. You must tee your ball within one club's length of the hole.
2. Your tee must be on the ground.
3. You are not to change the ball which you strike off the tee.
4. You are not to remove stones, bones or any break club for the sake of playing your ball, except on the fair green, and that only within a club's length of your ball.
5. If your ball comes among watter, or any wattery filth, you are at liberty to take out your ball and bringing it behind the hazard and teeing it, you may play it with any club and allow your adversary a stroke for so getting out your ball.
6. If your balls are to be found anywhere touching one another, you are to lift the first ball till you play the last.
7. At holling, you are to play your ball honestly for the hole, and not to play upon your adversary's ball, not lying in your way to the hole.
8. If you should lose your ball, by its being taken up, or any other way, you are to go back to the spot where you struck last and drop another ball and allow your adversary a stroke for the misfortune.
9. No man at holling his ball is to be allowed to mark his way to the hole with his club or anything else.
10. If a ball be stopp'd by any person, horse, dog, or anything else, the ball so stopp'd must be played where it lyes.
11. If you draw your club in order to strike and proceed so far in the stroke as to be bringing down your club; if then your club shall break in any way, it is to be accounted a stroke.
12. He whose ball lyes farthest from the hole is obliged to play first.
13. Neither trench, ditch or dyke made for the preservation of the links, nor the Scholar's Holes or the soldier's lines shall be accounted a hazard but the ball is to be taken out, teed and play'd with any iron club. 

