

3.2 Match Play

Purpose of Rule: Match play has specific Rules (particularly about concessions and giving information about the number of strokes taken) because the player and opponent:

- Compete solely against each other on every hole,
- Can see each other's play, and
- Can protect their own interests.

a. Result of Hole and Match

(1) **Winning a Hole.** A player wins a hole when:

- The player completes the hole in fewer strokes (including strokes made and penalty strokes) than the opponent,
- The opponent concedes the hole, or
- The opponent gets the general penalty (loss of hole).

If the opponent's ball in motion needs to be holed to tie the hole and the ball is deliberately deflected or stopped by any person at a time when there is no reasonable chance it can be *holed* (such as when the ball has rolled past the hole and will not roll back there), the result of the hole has been decided and the player wins the hole (see Rule 11.2a, Exception).

(2) **Tying a Hole.** A hole is tied (also known as "halved") when:

- The player and opponent complete the hole in the same number of strokes (including strokes made and penalty strokes), or
- The player and opponent agree to treat the hole as tied (but this is allowed only after at least one of the players has made a stroke to begin the hole).

(3) **Winning a Match.** A player wins a match when:

- The player leads the opponent by more holes than remain to be played,
- The opponent concedes the match, or
- The opponent is disqualified.

(4) **Extending a Tied Match.** If a match is tied after the final hole:

- The match is extended one hole at a time until there is a winner. See Rule 5.1 (an extended match is a continuation of the same round, not a new round).
- The holes are played in the same order as in the round, unless the Committee sets a different order.

But the Terms of the Competition may say that the match will end in a tie rather than be extended.

b. Concessions

(1) **Player May Concede Stroke, Hole or Match.** A player may concede the opponent's next stroke, a hole or the match:

- **Conceding Next Stroke.** This is allowed any time before the opponent's next stroke is made.
 - The opponent has then completed the hole with a score that includes that conceded stroke, and the ball may be removed by anyone.
 - A concession made while the opponent's ball is still in motion after the previous stroke applies to the opponent's next stroke, unless the ball is holed (in which case the concession does not matter).

- The player may concede the opponent's next stroke by deflecting or stopping the opponent's ball in motion only if that is done specifically to concede the next stroke and only when there is no reasonable chance the ball can be holed
- **Conceding a Hole.** This is allowed any time before the hole is completed (see Rule 6.5), including before the players start the hole.
- **Conceding the Match.** This is allowed any time before the result of the match is decided (see Rules 3.2a(3) and (4)), including before the players start the match.

(2) **How Concessions Are Made.** A concession is made only when clearly communicated:

- This can be done either verbally or by an action that clearly shows the player's intent to concede the stroke, the hole or the match (such as making a gesture).
- If the opponent lifts his or her ball in breach of a Rule because of a reasonable misunderstanding that the player's statement or action was a concession of the next stroke, a hole or the match, there is no penalty and the ball must be replaced on its original spot (which if not known must be estimated) (see Rule 14.2).

A concession is final and cannot be declined or withdrawn.

d. Responsibilities of Player and Opponent

(1) **Telling Opponent About Number of Strokes Taken.** At any time during play of a hole or after the hole is completed, the opponent may ask the player for the number of strokes (including strokes made and penalty strokes) the player has taken on the hole. This is to allow the opponent to decide how to play the next stroke and the rest of the hole, or to confirm the result of the hole just completed.

When asked for the number of strokes taken, or when giving that information without being asked:

- The player must give the right number of strokes taken.
- A player who fails to respond to the opponent's request is treated as giving the wrong number of strokes taken.

The player gets the **general penalty (loss of hole)** if he or she gives the opponent the wrong number of strokes taken, unless the player corrects that mistake in time:

- **Wrong Number of Strokes Given While Playing Hole.** The player must give the right number of strokes taken before the opponent makes another stroke or takes a similar action (such as conceding the player's next stroke or the hole).
- **Wrong Number of Strokes Given After Hole Completed.** The player must give the right number of strokes taken:
 - Before either player makes a stroke to begin another hole or takes a similar action (such as conceding the next hole or the match) or,
 - For the final hole of the match, before the result of the match is final (see Rule 3.2a(5)).

Exception – No Penalty If No Effect on Result of Hole: If the player gives the wrong number of strokes taken after a hole is completed but this does not affect the opponent's understanding of whether the hole was won, lost or tied, there is no penalty.

(2) **Telling Opponent About Penalty.** When a player gets a penalty:

- The player must tell the opponent about that penalty as soon as reasonably possible, taking into account how near the player is to the opponent and other practical factors.
- This requirement applies even if the player does not know about the penalty (because players are expected to recognize when they have breached a Rule).

If the player fails to do so and does not correct that mistake before the opponent makes another stroke or takes a similar action (such as conceding the player's next stroke or the hole), the player gets the **general penalty (loss of hole)**.

Exception – No Penalty When Opponent Knew of Player’s Penalty: If the opponent knew that the player had a penalty, such as when seeing the player obviously take penalty relief, the player gets no penalty for failing to tell the opponent about it.

(3) **Knowing Match Score.** The players are expected to know the match score – that is, whether one of them leads by a certain number of holes (“holes up” in the match) or the match is tied (also known as “all square”).

If the players mistakenly agree on a wrong match score:

- They may correct the match score before either player makes a stroke to begin another hole or, for the final hole, before the result of the match is final (see Rule 3.2a(5)).
- If not corrected in that time, that wrong match score becomes the actual match score.

Exception – When Player Requests Ruling in Time: If the player makes a timely request for a ruling (see Rule 20.1b), and it is found that the opponent either (1) gave the wrong number of strokes taken or (2) failed to tell the player about a penalty, the wrong match score must be corrected.

(4) **Protecting Own Rights and Interests.** The players in a match should protect their own rights and interests under the Rules:

- If the player knows or believes that the opponent has breached a Rule that has a penalty, the player may act on the breach or choose to ignore it.
- But if the player and opponent deliberately agree to ignore a breach or penalty they know applies, both players are **disqualified** under Rule 1.3b. I
- If the player and opponent disagree whether one of them has breached a Rule, either player may protect his or her rights by asking for a ruling under Rule 20.1b.

USGA MATCH PLAY RULES

What follows are few of the most common match play rules that differ from stroke play ones. This is not exhaustive or complete. We encourage you to review the USGA Rules of Golf carefully before competing in our match play tournaments.

1. **General Penalty:** The penalty for a breach of a Rule of Golf in match play is loss of hole except when otherwise provided. Rule 2-6.
2. A player may concede the opponent to have holed out with his next stroke and the ball may be removed by either side. A player may concede a hole to his opponent at any point during the play of a hole. If it’s hopeless, concede the hole, and move on to the next hole. Concessions may not be declined or withdrawn. Players may not agree in advance to any ‘gimmies’ or within the leather putts, only conceding putts on the green as they occur. Rule 2-4.
3. **Order of Play:** The player with honors on a hole must put his ball in play first. Honors on the first tee are determined by lot. On the tee at the first hole of a match, opponents will determine honors ‘by lot’. This means you can flip a coin, toss a tee, play rock-paper-scissors, or whatever. Rule 10-1a.
4. When the balls are in play, the ball farther from the hole shall be played first. If a player plays when his opponent should have played, the opponent may immediately require the player to cancel the stroke and, in correct order, play a ball without penalty as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was played. Rule 10-1b.
5. Provisional balls played from the teeing ground must be played after your competitor has played his first stroke. Rule 10-3.
6. **Giving your opponent correct information:** You must, as soon as practicable, inform your opponent when you incur a penalty. You must also inform your opponent, when asked, as to the number of strokes you have taken

on a hole, including penalty strokes. A player who fails to do so or gives incorrect information shall lose the hole. Rule 9-2.

7. Hitting opponent or his equipment: In match play, you have the option to replay the shot – in stroke play it's just 'rub of the green'. Rule 19-3.
8. Hitting a ball at rest on the green: In stroke play, if your putt strikes another ball on the green, you get a 2stroke penalty. In match play, there is no penalty. Rule 19.5a.
9. Resolving a Rules Dispute: Unlike in stroke play, a second ball cannot be played when a player is unsure of his rights or proper procedure. Instead, you must continue play even though the status of the match is in doubt. However, you can make a 'claim' to the committee in charge of the competition for a decision. To make a claim, you must notify your opponent before playing from the next teeing ground, letting him know the facts of the claim and that you want a ruling. After the competition, the claim will be resolved by the committee in charge of the competition. The standing of the match will be adjusted according to the decision of the Committee. Rule 2-5.