

Rules of Engagement — Part 2*By: Nathan Crace Date: July 19, 2003*

Note to Editor: Scrap the story I sent you the other day for this month. Roe's British Open "Dairy Queen" and the subsequent fallout are too good to pass up. Use the following instead:

Here we go again. In a cruel twist of irony, the golf Gods have bequeathed upon Mark Roe and Jesper Parnevik the ultimate punishment for carelessness under the Rules of Golf. Both were disqualified for signing incorrect scorecards after the third round of the British Open at Royal St. George's in Sandwich, England. And oddly enough for those of you who read my column, it was just two short months ago that I wrote a column ("Rules of Engagement") about how so many of the players in the professional circuit—professional golfers, not golf professionals—do not know the rules that govern their careers as well as they probably should know them.

Roe admitted it was his mistake. That was a big pill to swallow for a man who would have been tied for third following the third round, after what would have been a 67 on Saturday—the lowest round of the tournament to that point. Instead, his score of 67 was effectively annulled. It never existed in the minds of the R&A and the tournament committee. Parnevik was not so coy regarding his feelings about the matter, calling it "the dumbest thing ever. I don't know why they still have the stupid scorecard rule." Although he is correct in his assertion that Mark Roe was not intentionally trying to gain an advantage and more than likely that "everybody in the world, including [Parnevik] and [Roe] know what [Roe] shot today," it still does not excuse carelessness.

Yet, suddenly, a maelstrom of support for sweeping rules changes emerged from the media, rallying to the defense of Mark Roe—the man who himself acknowledged the debacle was his mistake! Ian Baker-Finch sat there on ABC Saturday evening saying that the rule was ridiculous and needed to be changed. The Internet news outlets were overflowing with reasons why such a "stupid rule" should have been thrown out years ago. I for one wholeheartedly, categorically, and unequivocally disagree with them. Rule 6.6.d clearly reads: "The competitor is responsible for the correctness of the score recorded for each hole on his card. If he returns a score for any hole lower than actually taken, he shall be disqualified. If he returns a score for any hole higher than actually taken, the score as returned shall stand." It's also important to understand here that it is the hole-by-hole score that is stipulated under the Rules—not the total.

So why then does it make sense to change the rules for all golfers because Mark Roe and Jesper Parnevik screwed up? Someone give me a well-thought and sensible argument based on logic and reasoning. Bear in mind that "Because it's stupid" and "Times have changed" do not count. So what should happen? Nothing. The rule should stay the same. You cannot change the Rules of Golf just because one of the world's best players made a big mistake in the oldest championship the game knows when the same rules govern all players—amateurs and professionals alike. In fact, I say that professional golfers should bear more of a burden since playing golf is what they do for a living. If a bricklayer makes a mistake on his taxes and it is caught, then maybe he should be given consideration and a chance to rectify the error. If a CPA does the same, shame on him—he should have known better. Mark Roe should be thankful the IRS does not administrate the British Open. If this one "incident" is such a call to arms, then the PGA Tour, the R & A and the USGA could simply institute another safety net for such high profile tournaments. Then again, that now would be a moot point because you can almost guarantee that given the publicity this has caused, only a player with the IQ of the paper upon which the scorecard is printed would not check to see if his score was on his scorecard with his name on it.

The plain and simple fact is, in its most basic form, Roe and Parnevik were careless. I wish all of the pundits and talking heads would stop shifting the blame and making the players the innocent victims! They knew better—or at least they should have. This "incident" does not equate to a need to change one of the most basic rules of the game. It's a slippery slope that the USGA and the R & A would not be able to control. And, at the risk of beating this dead horse much more, Mark Roe himself admits it was his mistake. It may have proven a tragedy for Mark Roe (and a blessing in disguise for Parnevik given his round of 81 on Saturday), but you can bet that he—or anyone else for that matter—will never let it happen again. Too tough a lesson you say? Until the Rules are changed, they are still the Rules—the very same ones you and I and every other golfer must adhere to when we play the game. It is the essence of what keeps the game of golf the game it has been, is, and will always be—a true sport where players are charged with governing themselves in the purist form of sportsmanship the world has ever seen. Of course I wish it hadn't happened and yes I feel sorry for Mark Roe; but strangely, according to Rule 6.6.d, had Parnevik scored higher than Roe on each individual hole, Roe would still be playing on Sunday—after a Saturday score of 81.

Nathan Crace is a golf course architect whose freelance "Lipouts" column is based, at times, on topics submitted to the author by readers like you. If you have a topic you would like to see discussed or wish to read past columns from the archives, log on to www.lipouts.com and let him know. Copyright 2003.