

Knowing the Rules of Golf and Match Play

Section 1: Overview of Golf Rules most commonly asked about with helpful Websites

Section 2: Match Play

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Below is a summary of many rules and situations to help you. Recently the USGA posted videos on their website that explain the rules by showing you the situation. The videos are an *excellent tool* for understanding the rules of golf. The website is:

www.usga-rules.com

Some golfers seem to be intimidated by the rules. Please don't be! They are there to help you. Always ask questions of players in your group. It is a learning experience and over time the rules become clearer, perhaps even fun.

For the players new to the rules: start out by reading the definitions in THE RULES OF GOLF published by the USGA. It is the most important part of the rule book. For example many times one hears the word "loose impediment". But what does it really mean? By reading just the definition, it all becomes clearer.

If in doubt about a rule while on the course, play two balls and get a ruling at the end of the round. One has to tell the fellow competitors which ball she would like to count. For instance, player hits a ball in a flower bed. Player is not sure if there is MANDATORY relief from the flower bed or not. Player has a good lie in the flower bed and would like to play that ball. In accordance to the rules player takes relief just in case there is mandatory relief from the flower bed, and drops a ball. Player tells fellow players she would like the ball that is in the flower bed to count.

There is also a section after "Situations" that explains MATCH PLAY.

Some Situations our members have asked questions about.

1. I constantly get RED and YELLOW stakes mixed up concerning my options. Help!

Let's start with a water hazard. Yellow stakes or yellow lines will indicate a water hazard.

Sometimes a water hazard might be designated as a water hazard even though there is rarely water in it.

Players can try to play out of a water hazard. If this is not possible there are two options. Under both circumstances there is a penalty of one stroke.

- 1) Return to the spot from where the previous ball was played and play it again.
- 2) Take a drop.

When taking a drop, the player must drop behind the point where the ball crossed the margin of the water hazard. One can go as far back as you wish. So be sure to choose a nice spot!

The one thing one has to do is keep the spot where the ball crossed the hazard between the hole and where you like to drop. The HOLE is ALWAYS part of the drop: in line where the ball went into the hazard to the point where you like to drop the ball

Do not forget, you can clean the ball.

Red stakes (and lines) indicate a lateral water hazard. A lateral water hazard is different from a water hazard by the fact that it is lateral. A lateral water hazard might be a creek that runs along the side a hole ,or a lake to the side of the fairway that extends all the way back to the tee or beyond. A water hazard does not necessarily have to have actually water in it. Dropping BEHIND such a hazard would be most times impossible. That is why a lateral water hazard are handled differently than “normal” water hazards

The options for a lateral water hazard are the same as above plus:

3) Drop a ball OUTSIDE the water hazard within two club lengths, but not nearer to the hole. Measure from the point where the ball last crossed the margin of the water hazard. One can measure with any club, including your driver. So this is maybe the time to start carrying a 6 foot driver?

4) Last option is one to totally confuse you. One can also drop on the OPPOSITE side of the hazard and drop on the hazard’s margin that is the same distance from the hole.

This could take a tree, bunker or other annoyance out of play.

By the way different sections of the same body of water can be designated a water hazard and a lateral hazard. Picture our beloved hole #12. The first part is lateral (red) then the hazard crosses more or less the fairway and turns into yellow stakes.

Many players talk about the line of flight. This actually means nothing in the rules of golf. We are only concerned about the POINT where the ball crosses the margin of the hazard. It does not matter if you were slicing or hooking the ball.

Knowing these rules will help you make the best choice and take advantage of a situation.

2. Player on Green, Opponent Off. Who goes first?

A player is on the green 20 feet from the hole; her opponent is off the green only 10 feet from the hole. Whose turn is it to play?

The player furthest from the hole plays first. It doesn't matter whether or not both, one, or neither ball is on the green.

3. Who can mark the ball on the putting green?

Rule 20 gives an answer:

A ball to be lifted under the rules may be lifted by the PLAYER, her PARTNER, or another person AUTHORIZED by the player. In any such case, the player is responsible for any breach of the rules. An onlooker if authorized by the player can also mark the ball.

The confusion is mostly about replacing.

Rule 20-3:

If a ball is to be replaced, the PLAYER, her PARTNER, or the person who LIFTED the ball must place it on the spot from which it was lifted.

Again the player is responsible for any breach of the rules during the replacing.

4. How to drop the ball correctly?

A ball to be dropped under the rules MUST be dropped by the PLAYER. She must stand erect, hold the ball at shoulder height and arm’s length and drop it. If the ball when dropped TOUCHES any person or equipment of any player the ball must be redropped WITHOUT PENALTY.

5. Can I lift a ball for identification in a hazard? The player is now allowed to lift her ball for identification in a hazard but the player must announce his intention to his opponent. The ball must NOT be cleaned beyond extent necessary for identification. (12-2). If the ball is covered by loose impediments, and the player removes the loose impediments, the player must replace the loose impediments but is permitted to leave a small part of the ball visible . (12-1)

6. What items are considered loose impediment? For instance are wet blades of grass considered "loose impediments"?

The answer is NO. Loose impediments are natural objects, providing they are NOT adhering to the ball. Therefore one also is not allowed to remove mud from the ball. Rule #23 is all about Loose Impediments. Interestingly sand and loose soils are loose impediments on the putting green but not elsewhere. Dew and frost are not loose impediments.

A couple of fun decisions on Rule # 23:

A live insect is not considered to be adhering to the ball and therefore is a loose impediment and you can pick it off the ball.

A fallen tree when not attached to the stump is a loose impediment. If still attached to the stump it is not.

Aeration plugs are not loose soil, therefore they are loose impediments.

Lastly, a live snake is an outside agency. A dead snake is a loose impediment. I guess we first have to shake the snake to determine if it is alive or not?

7. What about Geese droppings?

The Rules of Golf cannot be more specific.

A loose impediment are natural objects including :

stones,leaves,twigs,branches and the like

Dung

worms,insects and casts or heaps made by them

provided they are NOT

=fixed or growing

=solidly imbedded

=adhering to the ball

Therefore our annoying geese dung is a loose impediment unless it adheres to the ball.

In that case, the player has to play the ball as it lies or declare an unplayable ball.

Talking about loose impediments:

Remember a few years ago Tiger Woods asked spectators to help him move a boulder? This was allowed. Stones are natural objects and as long as it was not solidly embedded.

8.The ball is unplayable in the bunker. What options does a player have?

There is NO free way out. If the player declares the ball is unplayable (and takes a stroke penalty), then the player may:

1) go back to the spot from which the last stroke was made.

2) drop behind where the ball lay in a line with the hole

3) take 2 club lengths

If choosing # 2 or 3 ,the ball MUST be dropped IN the bunker.

9. Is it important that I announce I am hitting a “provisional ball”?

www.usga-rules.com/ProvisionalBall/

ABSOLUTELY!

Player hit her tee shot on a par three in a hazard. She teed up another ball and hit it very nicely on the green. Unfortunately she did NOT tell her competitors it would be a provisional ball. Therefore her second ball became the ball in play under penalty of stroke and distance. The original ball is lost. So, Please announce to your competitors that you are hitting to provisional ball.

The player was going to play the original (lost) ball but thankfully her caddie told her not to play it, otherwise the penalty's really would have been staggering or even disqualification would have been possible.

When playing a provisional ball, the player does not have to go look for the original ball, but if found by competitor or spectator the ball has to be played. A player should always tell her competitor when ball is found. If not, this would be considered bad sportsmanship and grounds for DQ.

10. Can a player replace a putter LOST during play?

NO. A lost club is not one which has become unfit for play in the normal course of play.

One may have only 14 clubs. If started with less than 14 clubs, the player may add a club as long as it is not borrowed from any other person playing on the course.

The player can declare a club out of play after discovering she carries more than 14 clubs. A penalty of 2 strokes is given for each hole the breach occurred with a max of 4 penalty strokes. The decisions of the rules clearly state one can NOT on the first tee have 15 clubs and declare one out of play without penalty. Take the club out of the bag and put it in your car otherwise there is a 2 stroke penalty.

11. What is “grounding a club”?

A question arose about grounding a club and why this could be important. First, grounding a club is just what it says: putting your club on the ground prior to the stroke. If there is tall grass, grounding the club is considered when the player compresses the grass to the point it will support the club. One gets a penalty when the ball moves after *addressing* the ball.

Addressing the ball is: When a player has taken his stance and has also *grounded* her club; except, in a hazard, a player has addressed the ball when she has taken her stance.

So when not in a hazard and the player puts their club behind the ball on the ground and takes her stance and for some reason the ball moves, unfortunately it will be a one stroke penalty and the ball must be replaced. In a hazard once the player has taken a stance (not grounding the club) and the ball moves the player receives a stroke penalty.

One thing Jack Nicklaus did throughout his career was always hovering his club above the ground. Therefore he never officially grounded his club (also it normally makes your swing more relaxed).

Rule 13-4 states one may not touch the ground in the hazard or water in the water hazard with hands or a club before making a stroke (remember from an earlier entry what a stroke really is:

forward movement of the club with intention of striking the ball). They are so kind that when in a hazard and the player loses her balance one can support one self with your club. Change of rule in the last few years also allows us now to take the rake into the bunker (= a hazard) and PLACE it in the sand. Do not drag the rake to test the sand consistency.

So, one cannot touch the ground in a hazard in their backswing. Michelle Wie received a penalty when she touched a pebble (loose impediment) in the bunker on her backswing. In a hazard do not remove any loose impediments (natural objects). If there is a piece of plastic etc. in the bunker one may remove this.

12. Does one get relief from poison ivy?

NO

The decisions on the rules of golf provide a clear answer. Decision 1-4/11 meaning of “dangerous situation” states: If a player's ball comes to rest in or near an area of plants such as POISON IVY, cacti, or stinging nettles, the player must either play the ball as it lies or if applicable, proceed under rule 26 (water hazard) or rule 28 (ball unplayable).

One would get relief under decision 1-4/10 if ball comes to rest near a LIVE!!! Rattlesnake (you are out of luck if the snake is dead) or a bees nest. It states “Unpleasant lies are a common occurrence which players must accept”.

13. What options do I have if I declare my ball is unplayable?

The best answer is found in the following video.

www.usga-rules.com/Unplayable/

Section 2: Match Play

2-1. General

A match consists of one *side* playing against another over a *stipulated round* unless otherwise decreed by the *Committee*.

In match play the game is played by holes. Except as otherwise provided in the *Rules*, a hole is won by the *side* that *holes* its ball in the fewer *strokes*. In a handicap match, the lower net score wins the hole. The state of the match is expressed by the terms: so many “holes up” or “all square,” and so many “to play.”

A *side* is “dormie” when it is as many holes up as there are holes remaining to be played.

2-2. Halved Hole

A hole is halved if each *side* holes out in the same number of *strokes*. When a player has *holed* out and his opponent has been left with a *stroke* for the half, if the player subsequently incurs a penalty, the hole is halved.

2-3. Winner of Match

A match is won when one *side* leads by a number of holes greater than the number remaining to be played. If there is a tie, the *Committee* may extend the *stipulated round* by as many holes as are required for a match to be won.

20 Rule 2

Rule 2 21

2-4. Concession of Match, Hole or Next Stroke

A player may concede a match at any time prior to the start or conclusion of that match. A player may concede a hole at any time prior to the start or conclusion of that hole. A player may concede his opponent's next *stroke* at any time, provided the opponent's ball is at rest. The opponent is considered to have *holed* out with his next *stroke*, and the ball may be removed by either *side*. A concession may not be declined or withdrawn.

(Ball overhanging hole — see Rule 16-2.)

2-5. Doubt as to Procedure; Disputes and Claims

In match play, if a doubt or dispute arises between the players, a player may make a claim. If no duly authorized representative of the *Committee* is available within a reasonable time, the players must continue the match without delay. The *Committee* may consider a claim only if the player making the claim notifies his opponent (i) that he is making a claim, (ii) of the facts of the situation and (iii) that he wants a ruling. The claim must be made before any player in the match plays from the next *teeing ground* or, in the case of the last hole of the match, before all players in the match leave the *putting green*. A later claim may not be considered by the *Committee*, unless it is based on facts previously unknown to the player making the claim and he had been given wrong information (Rules 6-2a and 9) by an opponent.

Once the result of the match has been officially announced, a later claim may not be considered by the *Committee*, unless it is satisfied that the opponent knew he was giving wrong information.

2-6. General Penalty

The penalty for a breach of a *Rule* in match play is loss of hole except when otherwise provided.

Some pointers on Match play:

You do not have to keep score: only holes won, lost or tied.

No penalty to tee up outside teeing ground but one can ask or be asked to replay the shot.

NEVER play out of turn. No ready golf here. (In SWGA matches, both teams must agree to ready golf. Do not assume, ask and confirm) Furthest from the hole goes first even when on the green and opponent is off the green. The side that wins the hole has the honor on the next tee. No penalty for playing out of turn but one can be asked to replay shot.

Can concede putts or hole at any time.

A player must not give wrong information to her opponent as to strokes taken (including when giving yourself a penalty). Penalty: loss of hole. See rule # 9

A player may practice on the course before competition. One may practice putting or chipping on or near the green last played, any practice putting green and the teeing ground of the next hole.

Mostly, Just play your game. Penalties do not come into play very often. NEVER give up. Do not be intimidated by other players. They may have a long game but the game is still won and lost with the short game. Keep an eye on what your opponent is doing, it may influence your decision how to play the hole.

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