
THE REFEREE

Decisions by the USGA Rules of Golf Committee

*Example of symbols: No. 48-111" means the 111th Decision issued in 1948.
"R. 8(1)" means Section (1) of Rule 8 in the 1948 Rules of Golf.*

Dissimilar Penalties

No. 48-111. R. 8(1), 9(1)

Q: USGA rules now call for loss of stroke and distance for lost ball or ball in an unplayable lie, but loss of distance only in the case of ball out of bounds. It is my understanding that the reduction of penalty on the ball out of bounds was more or less a recent change.

I am unable to find out why this change was made. It seems to me that the penalty for ball which goes off the course completely should be at least as great as that for a ball which may be a relatively good shot but which cannot be found, or if found is unplayable.

I shall greatly appreciate it if you will let me hear from you on this subject, with some explanation of this apparent inequity in the rules.

A. C. MOORE
CHICAGO, ILL.

A: The penalty for a ball out of bounds was reduced to loss of distance only, effective in 1947, for the following reasons, among others:

1. The Rule before 1947 permitted remission of the penalty stroke by local rule, and the great majority of clubs had such a local rule in effect. This Association occasionally adopted a similar local rule for its Championships when conditions warranted. The reduction of penalty therefore merely made the matter uniform.

2. It is a question of fact as to whether a ball is out of bounds, and not a question of the player's discretion. On the other hand, the penalty of stroke and distance for a lost or an unplayable ball provided in Rule 8(1) has not been changed because it is discretionary with the player as to whether his ball is unplayable and it may sometimes be discretionary with him as to whether his ball is lost—that is, he might purposely look in the wrong location and never find his ball. Where such discretion can enter, it is believed that the penalty should be sufficiently severe to discourage taking unfair advantage.

3. The case of a ball out of bounds occurs with considerable frequency, as compared with the cases of lost or unplayable balls, and it is felt that the penalty in the first case might well be less.

Smoothing Irregularities in Hazard

AFTER STROKE

No. 48-71. R. 17(1)

Q: A player played out of a sand trap, and proceeded at once to straighten out the trap. Her ball had landed at the top of the bunker and while she was straightening up the trap, her ball rolled back into the sand trap. Her opponent claimed that she had lost the hole because she had smoothed out the sand. What is the correct decision?

MRS. N. F. KEISLING
PITTSBURGH, PA.

A: Rule 17(1), last paragraph, provides: "There is no penalty for the player smoothing irregularities in the hazard made by his footprints or the soil displaced by his stroke, provided nothing is done that improves the lie of the ball or assists the player in his subsequent play of the hole."

BEFORE STROKE

No. 48-65. R. 17(1)

Q. 2: May a player whose ball is in a hazard (sand trap) go into the trap and with his clubhead or shoes smooth any irregularities before he plays the ball out of the hazard? A gentleman who is very well versed in golf rules claims the player may. The way I see it, by smoothing footprints before he plays he would know how deep the sand is, which would assist him in his subsequent play of the hole.

FRANK H. THORPE
BALTIMORE, MD.

A. 2: Your contention is correct. We would uphold a claim that such action *prior* to the stroke had assisted the player and that he violated Rule 17(1). It is up to the player to conduct himself so as to prevent any question from arising.

Striking Ball In Air

No. 48-66. D. 4; R. 2(1), 12(2, 3)

Q: At match play, the ball is in a sand trap, close to the bank. The player makes a stroke, the ball hits the bank, goes only a few feet in the air; the player takes a swing at the ball while it is in mid-air, and knocks

it onto the green. How many strokes has he played and what is the penalty, if any?

DR. RAY M. McNULTY
PITTSBURGH, PA.

A: The player loses the hole for playing a moving ball, in violation of Rule 12(3). See Rule 2(1).

Rule 12(2) does not apply. It covers striking the ball twice in the course of a single stroke, whereas in the case described the player made two separate strokes; under Definition 4, a stroke is the forward movement of the club made with the intention of striking the ball.



Unplayable Ball in Stroke Play

No. 48-59. R. 8(2b), 18(2, 3, 4),
18(5), 18(9)

Q. 2: Rule 8—In stroke play I declare my ball unplayable and choose to “tee and play a ball under penalty of two strokes” as provided for in 8(2b) rather than return to the spot from which the unplayable ball was played. (a) May I use a wooden tee? (b) What is the interpretation of “impossible” when I select a place to drop; if the ball is unplayable in the root of a tree in the woods bordering a fairway, may I go to the edge of the woods not nearer the hole where I can have a shot at the green or must I drop behind the tree, thus leaving myself an impossible shot following a two-stroke penalty?

A. 2: (a) Yes.

(b) “Impossible” refers to inability to keep the point from which the ball was lifted between the player and the hole and to play therefrom; it does not refer to the difficulty of the stroke left to be played. There is no limitation on how far the player may go behind the place from which the ball was lifted; the cardinal principle is to keep that place between himself and the hole if possible.

Removing Loose Impediment

Q. 3: Rule 18—In section (2) it is implied that loose impediments may be removed with the club head, yet in doing so a player would be violating section (3) by touching the line of the putt and he would be violating section (4) by scraping the surface of the putting green. What is the interpretation of this?

A. 3: A loose impediment may be removed from the putting green either by picking it up or with the club in the manner prescribed in Rule 18(2). In moving a loose impediment with the club, the player must be careful not to lay the club with more than its own weight upon the ground; he should also observe the custom of moving the club across the line of putt, not along the line. Rule 18(3) specifically permits touching the line of putt for this purpose. If the player confines himself only to moving the impediment, he should not be deemed to have tested the putting surface even though the grass be incidentally moved, as it inevitably must be. But if he goes beyond that, he may well be subject to penalty under Rule 18(4), second paragraph. It is up to the player to leave no doubt that he has not roughened or scraped or otherwise tested the putting surface.

Ball on Lip of Hole

Q. 4: Rule 18(9) states that an opponent shall play any subsequent stroke without delay after his ball has come to rest on the lip of the hole, yet in the note following that section it states that there is no time limit for determining the fact that the ball has come to rest. On a very windy day on a fast green it is conceivable that the wind could blow a ball into the hole if one waited long enough even though it had once come to rest. How would you settle the dispute which would arise if a player knocked a ball away to concede the putt when his opponent wished to wait awhile?

A. 4: The test of the Rule is whether or not the ball has come to rest. The player has no right to await action of wind upon the ball—see Rule 18(5). Play must proceed when the ball has come to rest, and an opponent who had holed out would be within his rights in knocking away the other ball which had come to rest.

Questions by

Lt. (J.G.) W. S. STEWART, USN
NORFOLK, VA.

Ball Leaning Against Flagstick

No. 48-60. R. 1(3), 7(7),
12(4e), 15(3)

Q: In a four-ball match, my partner played his third shot to the green, and it was apparent that it had come to rest very close to the pin. Upon approaching the green, it was discovered that the ball was virtually a “leaner.” I am quite certain that if the pin had been removed, the ball would have dropped to the bottom of the cup. My third shot fell in a bunker some 50 yards short of the green and to the right. The other players were surrounding the pin, looking at the position of my partner’s ball, and I

requested them to get away from the hole while I played my shot from the bunker. My shot struck the pin on the fly and dropped dead to the hole, but in striking the pin it caused my partner's ball to drop to the bottom of the hole. Was my partner entitled to an eagle 3? Both his shot and mine were from points considerably more than 20 yards from the hole.

JOHN L. TURNBULL
NEW YORK, N. Y.

A: As there is no specific Rule which directly applies, equity governs—see Rule 1(3). Thus, it is ruled that the partner's ball should have been replaced without penalty, under the principles of Rules 12(4e) and 15(3) (the flagstick being an outside agency). Then, if the ball when replaced had fallen into the hole after the flagstick were removed, the partner should have been deemed to have holed at his last stroke—see Rule 7(7), third paragraph.

The equity of this may be tested by supposing that the partner's ball had been knocked away from the hole when the player's ball struck the flagstick.

Note—in match play there is no so-called "20-yard limit" with respect to striking the flagstick—see Rule 7(7).



Water Hazard: No Provisional Ball

No. 48-56. R. 17(2), 19(e)

Q. 2: I understand that a provisional ball may not be played for a ball which one knows definitely to have gone into a water hazard. However, suppose the player thinks her tee shot may be lost or out of bounds and therefore plays a provisional ball for either possibility, but then finds the first ball in a water hazard. Must the player use this provisional ball, and is she not prohibited from dropping a ball behind the hazard in the manner provided in Rule 17(2a)? I get this from Rule 19(e). So, although Rule 17(2), fifth paragraph, says that the Rules do not permit playing a provisional ball for a ball which may be in a water hazard, there is this exception.

MRS. MCLEOD THOMSON
ATLANTIC CITY, N. J.

A. 2: As the second ball apparently was played in accordance with Rule 17(2c), it must be continued in play—see Rule 19(e). The second ball was provisional for a ball possibly lost or out of bounds. It was not provisional for a ball which might have been in a water hazard; the first ball had to be abandoned even though it might have been playable in the water hazard.

Penalty for Lost Ball

No. 48-82. R. 8(1)

Q: Under the Revised Rules of Golf, a lost ball incurs a penalty stroke and loss of distance. Under prior rules (XXII (1)), penalty was the same, but a footnote allowed the penalty stroke to be remitted by local rule. I find nothing in the Revised Rules allowing local rule to remit the penalty stroke. Can such be done under present Revised Rules?

J. P. HILL
SAN ANGELO, TEXAS

A: No. The penalty stroke in Rule 8(1) may never be remitted.

Rule 22(1) of the former Rules did not allow remission of the penalty stroke for a lost ball. Perhaps you have this confused with former Rule 23(1) which did condone remission by local rule of the penalty stroke for a ball out of bounds. In present Rule 9(1) the penalty for a ball out of bounds is loss of distance only.

Ball Striking Fellow Competitor's

No. 48-78. R. 11(3, 3a), 12(4c, 4d)

Q. 1: Rule 12(4c) states for stroke play: "When both balls are on the putting green, if a competitor's ball strikes a fellow competitor's ball the competitor incurs a penalty of two strokes and the ball which was struck shall be at once replaced." Does this mean that the penalty is incurred whenever both balls are on the green at the time of impact or only when both balls are lying on the putting green at the time the stroke is played?

A. 1: The penalty is incurred only when both balls are on the putting green when the stroke is played.

Q. 2: In which, if any, of the following situations does the penalty apply?: In stroke competition a ball lying on the putting green as defined in Rule 18 is struck by a ball played from (a) the teeing ground of a par 3 hole, (b) the fairway from a point more than 20 yards from the hole, (c) from within a bunker at a point more than 20 yards from the hole, (d) from within a bunker at a point less than 20 yards from the hole.

A. 2: The penalty does not apply in any case cited.

Attention is called to the fact that the ball moved must be replaced (Rule 12(4d)). See also Rule 11(3, 3a) about lifting or playing a ball which might interfere with or assist the play of another ball.

Questions by: JOHN C. LASHER
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