
THE REFEREE

Decisions by the USGA Rules of Golf Committee

Example of symbols: "No. 49-1" means the first decision issued in 1949. "R. 7 (3)" means Section 3 of Rule 7 in the current Rules of Golf

Spectator Picks Up Ball

No. 49-77. R. 15(3)

Q. Kindly note the following newspaper item about the Masters Tournament at the Augusta National Golf Club:

"Dutch Harrison lost a ball right in the middle of the 15th fairway.

A spectator crossing the course picked it up and disappeared. It cost Harrison two strokes."

From the 15th tee it would be impossible to lose a ball driven in the direction of the green. I find nothing in the Rules that gives relief, except by the local committee. In view of the large crowds attending tournaments, some relief should be given a player under the published Rules.

R. M. HUBERT
ATHENS, GA.

A. We are not aware of all the facts in the particular case or of the decision by the local committee. Therefore, we can offer only the following general comment:

Where there is no question that a ball has been picked up by a spectator, Rule 15(3) governs, as follows: "If the lie of a ball at rest be altered by any outside agency except wind, the player shall drop, or on the putting green place, a ball as near as possible to the place where it lay, without penalty." It is not necessary to recover the original ball, as the Rule provides that a ball (not the ball) shall be dropped (or placed, as the case may be).

Flagstick Can Be Removed

No. 49-78. R. 7(7); LR

Q. 1: We know that a player's ball hitting the flagstick within 20 yards of the hole incurs a penalty of two strokes in medal play. Likewise, with a caddie attending the flagstick in match play, loss of the hole is the penalty sustained by the player whose caddie is holding the stick.

In match play, A is playing out of a trap beside the putting green and intends to play an explosion shot. He tells the opponent's caddie to leave the pin in and step away from the hole as he does not want to endanger hurting the caddie in case the shot might be picked clean. Opponent B is willing to have his caddie not stand at the hole and hold the pin, but insists on

the flagstick being left in the hole, claiming that should A hit the pin, A would lose the hole.

Is there any ruling to the effect that a player can insist on the flagstick being left in the hole when his opponent is playing?

A. 1: No. Rule 7(7) permits either side to remove the flagstick at any time so that a player might not have the possible advantage of striking an unintended flagstick.

Winter Rules Not Recognized

Q. 2: Regarding winter rules, we know that the main purpose is for the protection of the fairways. When a ball comes to rest in an adjacent fairway other than the hole being played, is there a USGA ruling as to whether or not the player can tee his ball as he would in the fairway he is supposed to be on? Or is that left entirely up to the local committee?

A. 2: The Rules of Golf do not recognize so-called "winter rules". Decision 48-28 states the USGA's position.

Questions by: CASPER A. SHEEN
TOLEDO, OHIO

Line of Play Subordinate

No. 49-79, R. 7 (4,5)

Q. 1: Frequently we are confronted with situations involving application of Rule 7 where that Rule does not give us the complete answer. So far as we have been able to determine, the current Rules of Golf say nothing about either improving or not improving your line of play to the green while lifting and dropping under Rule 7, yet it seems to be generally accepted that this should not be done. The purpose of our query is to determine whether officially there is some rule which prohibits a player by lifting and dropping under Rule 7 from improving his line of play to the green. In other words, is it simply an unwritten rule or is it a rule that a player may insist that his opponent follow? The following are examples that we run into on our course:

The ball comes to rest close to a guy wire in such manner that the guy wire interferes with the forward swing. In this position both the guy wire and a tree are between the ball and the green.

If the ball is lifted and dropped two club-lengths back of the guy wire on the same line of flight that the ball was traveling when it came to rest, the line of flight to the green will also be interfered with by the guy wire and the tree. However, by dropping two club-lengths from the nearest spot on the guy wire (and no nearer the hole) but out toward the left rather than back on the line of flight, the player can get a clear shot to the green. In other words, although he strictly follows Rule 7 (4c), the player can substantially improve his line of flight to the hole.

A. 1: The purpose of Rule 7 (4,b and c) is to give the player opportunity to strike the ball fairly without interference by an artificial obstruction. The Rule is not concerned with the desired line of flight of the ball. It is recognized that in some cases the line of play may be improved even though the procedure stated in the Rule is followed exactly. In other cases, however, the player in obtaining relief to swing the club freely may have his line of play impaired. Either way, it is a break of the game of the sort which, experience has shown, cannot be made a matter of rule, and which has to be accepted in the spirit of the game. The paramount object of the Rule is to give freedom for striking the ball without artificial interference.

Thus in the case described, the player is within his rights as long as he drops the ball within two club-lengths of that point of the guy wire nearest where the ball originally lay, and the ball must come to rest not nearer the hole than its original lie. If in so doing the player happens to improve his desired line of play, he is within his rights.

Artificial Drain Defined

Q. 2: A player slices through a line of trees and the ball rolls into a round-bottom concrete drain ditch that runs down the far edge of the trees. Under local rules, the player can lift without penalty and drop no nearer the hole. If he drops within a club-length on the line the ball was traveling when it went into the ditch, he will be in the trees. However, if he can drop on the other side of the ditch no nearer the hole), he will have a clear shot to the green. May he do this?

A. 2: The local rule should be interpreted by the local committee which made it. Not having seen the condition, we can hardly appraise it fairly. It is possible that a lift without penalty should not be given and that the local rule should be abolished.

As used in Rule 7 (4), the term "artificial drains" does not apply to

ditches. A ditch is a hazard, under Rule 17 (Definition), and the fact that it may be a drainage ditch does not necessarily remove it from the hazard classification; in fact, all ditches doubtless have drainage value. It should be further noted that a dry ditch, although a hazard, is not necessarily a water hazard unless it is so classified specifically. The course on which the 1948 Amateur Championship was played had a number of ditches lined with concrete, and they were classed as water hazards.

Of course, a local rule may be adopted to classify ditches as obstructions under Rule 7 (4), but we would advise that such a matter first be considered with great care.

For information, the term "artificial drains" as used in Rule 7 (4) means drains (not ditches) of such materials as metal, tile or concrete or which are manufactured even though they may not be exposed. If any attached or surrounding depressions or runways or bulkheads are to be considered locally as artificial obstructions under Rule 7 (4), their margins must be defined exactly.

Dropping Ball from Ditch

Q. 3: Assuming the same facts as in Question 2 and that the ball rolls 25 yards toward the hole down the concrete ditch, do you drop out where the ball comes to rest or do you go back the 25 yards where the ball went into the ditch? This also might make a substantial difference in the next shot.

A. 3: See Answer 2. If the ditch is classed as a water hazard, the last point at which the ball crossed the margin of the hazard determines the line on which a ball may be dropped under Rule 17 (2). However, if a local rule classifies the ditch as an obstruction under Rule 7 (4), the place at which the ball ultimately comes to rest controls dropping.

Drop May Improve Line of Play

Q. 4: A ball comes to rest in ground under repair. Between the ball and the green is a tree. This is also true of the spot where the ball went into the ground under repair, but two club-lengths out from the nearest edge of the ground and no nearer the hole puts the ball with a clear shot to the pin. Under Rule 7 (5a), may the player improve his line of flight in this manner?

A. 4: Yes, provided he observes Rule 7 (5). The principle involved is the same as in Answer 1.

Questions by: EUGENE KELLY
LOS ANGELES, CAL.

Line Of Putt May Not Be Touched

No. 49-90. R. 1(3), 2(1,2), 18(3).

Q: During the Public Links Championship qualifying here, Player A holes a putt while Player B awaits his turn. After taking the ball from the cup, Player A pats down the edge of the cup in the line of Player B's putt.

Is there any sort of penalty? I have searched the Rule Book but can't find an answer.

DUDLEY GREEN
NASHVILLE, TENN.

A: The Rules of Golf relating to the putting green forbid that the line of the putt be touched; see Rule 18(3). This is meant to apply to the player's own putt, but in stroke play a competitor who has holed out should not touch the line of putt of a fellow competitor as such action might well be of assistance to the fellow competitor, who is playing against the field.

There is nothing in the Rules of Golf which would permit one to touch the line of a fellow competitor's putt. Rule 1(3) provides that, "If a point in question be not covered by the Rules of Golf or local rules, it shall be decided by equity." Therefore, it is ruled that the competitor who touched the line of putt is penalized two strokes under Rule 2(1). If it should appear that the line of putt was touched with the knowledge and consent of the fellow competitor, both players should be disqualified for their dishonorable attempt to evade the spirit of the game; see Rule 2 (2).

If a player consider that a hole has been damaged or otherwise does not conform with Rule 18(Def.), he should immediately report the matter to the committee in charge, which should have the hole repaired promptly. In stroke play it is preferable for a competitor not to attempt to repair a damaged hole, and in the interest of fair play any such practice should be avoided.

Practice Putts Permitted

No. 49-92. D.4: R. 10(1) 13(5)

Q. 1: After a player has holed out, may he drop a ball or two and hit practice shots before moving to the next tee?

A. 1: Yes, but he may be subject to penalty under Rule 2(3) prohibiting delay in play.

Rule 13(5) provides: "After playing from the first teeing ground a player shall not play a practice stroke with a ball from any teeing ground or during the play of any hole."

Croquet Stroke Permitted

Q. 2: May a player use a putter by swinging it between his legs in much the manner as some people play croquet? This putter is especially made to be used in this manner, the shaft being bent before entering the head of the club so that it does not violate the rule which provides that the shaft must enter the putter between the heel and a line terminating at the center of the sole. Neither could the head of the putter be termed a "mallet."

A. 2: The Rules of Golf provide no restriction on the type of stroke played provided the stroke is in fact a stroke and does not conflict with Definition 4 and Rule 10(1).

Questions by: ROBERT W. GOLDWATER
PHOENIX, ARIZ.

Unplayable Lie: How To Proceed After Failure To Hit Ball

No. 49-101. R. 8.

Q: In a tournament a ball came to rest between two immovable stones. The player attempted to play the ball, but his club struck one of the stones during the swing and he fanned the ball. After this stroke, he decided to declare the ball unplayable and asked me where he should drop the ball. My reply was he would have to play the ball as it lay, between the two stones. Was I correct?

JOHN GUSTAFSON
DULUTH, MINN.

A: Match Play—Under Rule 8(1), the only procedure open to the player was to drop a ball, under penalty of one stroke, as nearly as possible at the spot from which the unplayable ball was last played. But, as the last stroke (which missed the ball) was played from between the stones, the player was obliged to drop a ball at that same spot. If the ball then happened to roll into a playable position, he could have proceeded (unless it came to rest nearer the hole, in which case he would have been obliged to re-drop; see Rule 10 (5)); if the ball happened to roll into another unplayable lie, he would have been obliged to give up the hole.

Stroke Play—Under Rule 8(2), the player could have done either of the following:

(a) Proceeded as above for match play, or

(b) Under penalty of two strokes, teed a ball so as to keep the point from which the ball was lifted between himself and the hole; if this were impossible, he could have teed a ball as near as possible to the place from which the ball was lifted but not nearer the hole.

Moving Tree Branch in Address

No. 49-116. R. 2(1), 7(3)

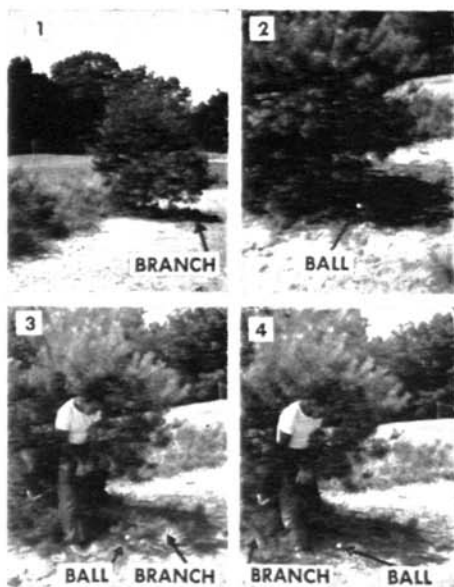
Q. At the right of the fairway as one approaches the sixth green at Pine Valley Golf Club, Clementon, N.J., and approximately 40 yards from the putting green, is a sand trap two or three feet lower than the fairway. Growing out of this trap is a pine tree eight feet high, whose branches intermingle with another live pine tree which is fifteen feet high and also grows out of the trap. (Snapshot No. 1.)

The lowest branch of the eight-foot pine tree is alive, is over four feet long, comes out of the tree trunk a few inches above the sand in the trap and droops in the trap so close to this sand that some of its twigs and needles touch the sand. During the play of this hole, a golf ball intended for the sixth green comes to rest on the sand in the trap under the middle of this branch, two and a half feet from the trunk of the eight-foot tree, at which point the branch with its twigs and needles is two feet wide and some parts of it touch the sand. (Snapshot No. 2.)

The line of the ball to the green is at about a 70° angle to this branch.

The conformation of the eight-foot tree permits the player, who is right-handed, to take his stance parallel to the line from the ball to the green without moving the branch under which the ball lies. To play in the direction of the green, however, he must back into other branches of the eight-foot tree and stand with his back against its tree trunk. He can straddle the branch under which the ball lies. (Snapshot No. 3.)

Under the Rules of Golf, can the player, without penalty, in taking his stance, bend the branch under which the ball lies approximately horizontally by nudging with one of his legs so that he will not be astraddle it and so he will move the branch under which the ball lies to where the ball will no longer be under it and will be able to take his swing in the general direction of the green without this branch being in the arc of his swing? Were the branch to be so moved, its twigs and needles would scrape the sand in the trap while the branch was being moved. However, the structure of the tree and the branch, the latter being supple and relatively



small, would permit the player to so bend the branch without breaking it. (Snapshot No. 4.)

If the answer to the foregoing question is in the negative, what is the penalty at match play in the event the player does nudge the branch under discussion in the manner above set forth and illustrated in Snapshot No. 4.

H. W. BURRITT
BLOOMINGTON, ILL.

A. If the player were to move the branch in the manner described, he would violate Rule 7(3) by improving the position of his ball. The penalty in match play would be the loss of hole; see also Rule 2(1).

Rule 7(3) contemplates that there may be some moving, bending or breaking of fixed or growing objects as an incident in the course of taking a fair stance at address and in making the backward or forward swing, and it excuses such incidental movements. However, the Rule prohibits purposeful moving, bending or breaking with the aim of improving the position of the ball. The second exception in Rule 7(3) condones only such moving, bending or breaking as may incidentally be done in making the swing, but it does not allow such action in order to make the swing.

The player has taken his stance correctly in Snapshot No. 3; he is entitled to back into the tree in order to take a fair stance. He has violated the Rule in Snapshot No. 4 by bending out of the way the branch interfering with his ball.

