
THE REFEREE

Decisions by the USGA Rules of Golf Committee

Example of symbols: "No. 51-1" means the first decision issued in 1951. "R.7(3)" means Section 3 of Rule 7 in the 1951 Rules of Golf.

"NO LOCAL RULES"

By ISAAC B. GRAINGER

USGA VICE-PRESIDENT AND CHAIRMAN OF RULES OF GOLF COMMITTEE

"No Local Rules."

The above expression on a club score card is a "mark of distinction" for that club.

Why? Well, first, there is the recognition that the game would not be golf without uniform Rules. Then there is the acknowledgment that the Rules of Golf represent the accumulated experience and considered views over a long period of many persons devoted to the game's best interest, with fair play and sportsmanship always the keynote.

What would be a greater compliment to the character of a course than to give notice that its construction conformed entirely to the pattern set by the general Rules?

But the reader may also ask if local rules are not essential in many cases. The answer is — not very often. Having been developed from experience, the Rules as written are practical and will apply to almost every known condition. There are very few courses in the United States on which the Rules cannot be invoked with fairness and with the original intent preserved. Local adaptations usually have failed to pass the test of time and very often violate the basic Rules.

The only justification for a local rule is the impossibility of carrying out the provisions or intent of the basic Rules. It is certainly not the substitution of a local committee's judgment for that of a long succession of USGA committees, which have studied almost every conceivable situation.

These USGA committees have been in

a position to scrutinize the adaptability of all of the Rules under varied conditions through requests for interpretation which have been made over the years. It would take little imagination to realize how chaotic the game would become if each club committee decided that certain Rules were either too strict or liberal and amended them accordingly by local edict. The character of the game would change so greatly from course to course that a uniform set of Rules would be useless, and the average player would be severely burdened by these additional handicaps, except at his home club.

It is fully realized that there are many clubs at which local rules are at variance with USGA Rules, despite agreement on the part of USGA member clubs, among other things, to uphold the Rules of the Association. A typical case of confusion is demonstrated by the following request for guidance from a member of a USGA member club:

No. 51-4. R. 7(4), 9. RLR

Q: There is a difference of opinion in my club between the Rules of Golf Committee and the Green Committee as to how far a club, which is a member of the USGA, may go in adoption of local rules.

Our Green Committee, over the objections of our Rules of Golf Committee, adopted the following local rules applying to match play:

(1) *Stakes supporting trees.* If a player's stroke be interfered with by such a stake striped in red, the ball may be lifted and dropped without penalty; however, if the stake is not so painted, it must be played as it lies or lifted and dropped with a penalty of one stroke.

(2) *Protective screens.* There are two screens on our course protecting players who are on our 11th and 12th fairways. The Green Com-

mittee has caused signs to be posted thereon reading: "If stroke interfered with, lift and drop within 2 club lengths. Penalty 1 stroke."

Our Rules of Golf Committee has objected, as both local rules are not in conformity with Rule 7(4) for artificial obstructions or Rule 8 for unplayable lie.

(3) To the right of our 15th fairway, an extensive area on which play has always been permitted is now being leveled. This area, which is factually ground under repair, is being treated by the Green Committee as follows: Part of the area is marked with stakes and declared "Out of Bounds." Part is posted "Ground Under Repair."

Our Rules of Golf Committee has objected on the grounds that all of the area is properly "Ground Under Repair," that designating part of it as "Out of Bounds" and part "Ground Under Repair" violates not only the Rules but causes confusion as it is impossible to determine where one ends and the other begins.

Am I correct in stating that this local rule also violates Rule 9, which specifically provides that ground under repair may not be included in "out of bounds"?

It was the unanimous opinion of the members of our Rules Committee that such actions violate the Rules and the spirit of the game, result in confusion amongst the players, invite ridicule by visiting players who know their rights, and result in improper and unfair handicapping. The latter applies particularly when our members compete in interclub handicap tournaments with players whose handicaps have been arrived at with proper observance of the Rules.

Our Green Committee takes the position that there is no limit as to how far a club may go in adopting its own local rules and that their local rules take precedence over USGA even though such local rules go far beyond the limitations and recommendations of the USGA.

Our Board of Directors supported the position taken by our Green Committee; and our Rules Committee, with myself as Chairman, thereupon resigned.

The members of my Rules Committee would like to have your comments as to whether we were justified in maintaining our firm position. If we are properly supported by you, we wish to present this fact to our Board with the hope that the authority for drawing local rules and interpreting USGA Rules may be vested in a Rules of Golf Committee composed of members who not only know the Rules but are familiar with the decisions of your body, of which we feel we are indirectly a part.

Any construction of the duties of a Green Committee that would allow such a committee to frame the above or other similar local rules would, in my opinion, make our USGA Rules a farce and would result in playing a game which is not golf but an individual interpretation thereof.

Questions by AL RABIN
LOS ANGELES, CAL.

The USGA answered this request by outlining the viewpoint expressed in the opening paragraphs of this article, with the following further comments:

It is recognized that local rules are sometimes necessary. That is why a section of the Rules of Golf is devoted to "Recommendations for Local Rules." However, local rules should not run counter to the spirit behind the basic Rules.

USGA Member Clubs not only can benefit from the practical value of the well-tried Rules of Golf but they should observe them for the general good of the game. Acceptance of USGA membership binds a Member Club to uphold the Constitution, By-Laws and other rules of the Association.

The USGA does not attempt to penalize a club for failing to observe the spirit of the Rules of Golf. As a matter of fact, such club penalizes itself by its own failure to take advantage of the Rules as written.

The USGA requests all Member Clubs to uphold the Rules of Golf.

As for the respective duties of a club green committee and a club rules of golf committee, their work should be defined by the authority which created them.

As for the particular local rules in the question, we offer the following comment:

(1) *Stakes supporting trees.* It is not clear why your local rule gives relief without penalty from some stakes and not others. Under the Rules of Golf, all such stakes are artificial obstructions and a player is entitled to free relief under Rule 7(4).

(2) *Protective screens* within a course are artificial obstructions, and a player is entitled to free relief under Rule 7(4).

(3) The Rules of Golf leave it up to the local authorities to determine boundaries — see Rule 9, Definition, which provides that out of bounds is "ground on which play is prohibited, but it does not include ground under repair."

Artificial Obstruction: Repeated Relief

No. 50-107. Def. 3; R. 1(3), 7(4), 10(5b)

Q 1: Under Rule 7 having to do with artificial obstructions, if a player's ball lie within two club-lengths of any such obstruction which is immovable, the ball may be lifted and dropped at the nearest point not nearer the hole which permits the player to take his stance without interference by the obstruction. When a ball so dropped has rolled back to approximately its former position, may the player relift and redrop the ball?

A 1: Yes, if the ball's new position satisfies the conditions in Rule 7(4). In order for the player to obtain relief, the obstruction must interfere with the player's backward or forward swing or his stance. In such a case, the ball

may be dropped within two club-lengths of that point of the obstruction nearest where the ball originally lay, and must come to rest not nearer the hole.

Q 2: How many times may this be done?

A 2: There is no specified limit. However, if the configuration of the ground is the cause and several attempts at dropping always fail to bring relief, the ball may be placed—see Rules 10(5b) and 1(3).

SAM W. REYNOLDS
OMAHA, NEB.

Ball on Lip of Hole: Brief Delay

No. 50-112. R. 2(3), 3(2), 11(3c) 12 (3, 4d, 5), 18(7, 9)

Q: I would appreciate ruling about ball on lip of cup. How long should you wait? Also, what is definite procedure about conceding and who has to pick the ball up, match play and medal play?

IRWIN E. SCHLOSS
BALTIMORE, MD.

A: (A) In match play, Rule 18(9) entitles player to "a momentary delay" to determine whether or not his ball is at rest on the lip of the cup. There is no specified time limit—it is a question of fact as to whether the ball is at rest. Since the player incurs a penalty under Rule 12(3) if he puts while his ball is moving, he should be given the benefit of any doubt, but he must not delay play in contravention of Rule 2(3).

When a player has not holed out, Rule 18(7) precludes him from conceding his opponent's putt unless the opponent's ball is within six inches of the hole. In the latter circumstance, the player may ask his opponent to lift his ball and concede the next stroke. The player should not knock away his opponent's ball: see Rule 12(5).

When a player has holed out, he may concede his opponent's putt from any distance: see Rule 18(9).

(B) In stroke play, it is not permissible to concede a fellow competitor's putt. Each competitor is responsible to the entire field to insure that his fellow competitor completes the stipulated round: see Rule 3(2). Rule 12(4d) provides: "If a competitor's ball which is at rest be moved by another competitor or his caddie or forecaddie or his clubs or his ball, the ball shall be replaced." Rule 11(3c) provides: "If a competitor or his caddie pick up his ball before it is holed out (except as permitted by the Rules), he shall, before he has struck off from the next teeing ground, or, in the case of the last hole of the round, before he has left the putting green, be permitted to replace the ball under penalty of two strokes."

Dropping Ball Behind Water Hazard

No. 50-115. R. 3(Def., 2) 17 (2a, b and c)

Q 1: (a) A lies 2 on a road, three yards short of a water hazard. His third shot goes into the water hazard. With a penalty stroke he

drops back 20 yards on a level grassy lie. Is it permissible to drop farther back than your original lie?

(b) I base my claim that he cannot on Rule 17(2) (c).

He bases his claim that he can on the last 2 lines on page 41 in the 1950 Rules book.

Did not that rule prior to 1936 read: "There is no limitation as to how far behind a hazard a ball shall be dropped—within its line of flight.?"

A 1: (a) Yes, provided the player is proceeding under Rule 17(2a or b).

(b) No. The Rule governing a ball in a water hazard prior to 1936 contained the following Note: "There is no limitation as to how far behind a hazard a ball may be dropped."

Q 2: If a player play his ball from a lie within a water hazard and fail to get out, may he drop ball back of hazard with penalty stroke? If so, where would he properly drop it?

A 2: Yes. He keeps the point at which the ball lay in the hazard, after his unsuccessful stroke, between him and the hole. The basic principle of keeping the hazard between the player and the hole when he drops is maintained and equity served by the foregoing determination.

Ball Wrongly Assumed in Water Hazard

Q 3: A assumed her tee shot to be lost in a water hazard and, after searching for five minutes, dropped a ball back of hazard and played it onto the green. She then found her original ball on apron and proceeded to play out hole with it, over protest of fellow competitor. The committee disqualified her, contending that she was not entitled to play either ball but should have gone back to the tee from where her original ball was played and treated her original as a lost ball. Was our decision correct?

A 3: Yes. A did not play the stipulated round as provided—see Rule 3 (Def., 2).

A had no right to assume that her ball was lost in a water hazard. It is a question of fact whether a ball struck towards a water hazard is lost in the hazard or outside the hazard.

Questions by: MRS. G. C. GOURDEAU
SANTA MONICA, CAL.

Removing Grass Blade from Ball

No. 50-116. R. 2(1), 10(4)

Q: In tournament play, a player removed a blade of grass from her ball on the putting green. She did not move her ball. We have not been able to find a rule on this.

EDITH M. WEISMANN
CHICAGO, ILL.

A: The player violated Rule 10(4) by cleaning the ball. The penalty is loss of hole in match play and two strokes in stroke play, under Rule 2(1).