

Uniformity in the Rules -- or "Jungle Law"?

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If the new world-wide Rules of Golf are to have real meaning, they must be *observed* uniformly by players and committees.

This is the only way in which fair play can be had. The aim of the Rules is to produce fair play.

Any departure from uniformity would produce unfairness. Committees sometimes are tempted to adopt local rules which conflict with the basic Rules of Golf or which "soften" penalties. This is a pitfall to be avoided, for it could have a number of unfortunate results, among them the following:

1. The interrelation among the Rules would be distorted. The Rules are so closely integrated and dove-tailed that serious departure from one Rule would automatically throw the code as a whole out of balance.

2. Scores would tend to be lower and therefore handicaps would be lower for the players affected. Thus, their handicaps would be out of line with handicaps of players whose clubs observe the Rules as written. Play under "soft" local rules would ultimately put the players at a disadvantage.

3. There would be a general lowering of standards and diminished respect for Rules of orderly procedure. This would result in unfairness, a tendency toward "jungle law" of every man for himself, and eventually chaos in the conduct of play.

A tendency to depart from the uniform Rules should be regarded as a danger signal. Sometimes it indicates a deeper need — a need to make architectural changes in the course. If it is desired to ease the course, the root of the trouble should be probed. But changing the Rules by local amendment is no proper substitute for changing the course.

The dove-tailing of the Rules is perhaps most strikingly illustrated by Rule



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29 relating to a ball lost, unplayable or out of bounds.

In the past there have been unfortunate experiments with a penalty of loss of distance only for a ball lost or unplayable.

In the case of a possible lost ball, under such a penalty there often would be no incentive for a selfish player to make an honest search. He simply might prefer not to find his ball if it were apt to be in an atrocious lie. He thus could look in the wrong places and otherwise abuse the discretion which such a "soft" penalty would allow him.

The same would be essentially true of an unplayable ball. When a local rule provided a penalty of loss of distance only, a player once had a two-foot putt on a fast green, on a windy day. The ball missed the hole and slid ten feet past. The player deemed the ball unplayable and, under the penalty of distance only, replaced it where it originally lay. He thus had his old two-foot putt instead of the ten-footer.

Further, suppose a ball were lying well on grass 15 yards from the hole, with a bunker intervening. The player flubs his shot into sand in the bunker. If he feels inexperienced in playing from sand, and if the unplayable penalty were distance only, he could merely drop the ball back on the turf where it first lay, and he would have the next shot to play from grass instead of sand. The distance lost would be inconsequential.

On a par-3 hole, assume that the player's tee shot strays into woods. Although the ball lies well, the player is blocked out from the green. He elects to deem the ball unplayable and returns to

the tee for another try, playing 2 under the distance-only penalty.

Suppose in similar circumstances that the player has played a provisional ball from the tee before going forward to appraise the situation. If the provisional ball is on the green and within reasonable putting distance, the player would be quick to choose to play that ball under the distance-only penalty.

It is obvious that severe inequities can be produced by a distance-only penalty for a ball lost or unplayable. It is equally obvious that such a rule could allow golf to degenerate into a game of "replay", in which the player could try over any stroke he didn't like and lose nothing more than that stroke. This could slow up the game and change its basic nature.

The only feasible way to safeguard against such consequences is to have a basic penalty of stroke and distance for a ball lost or unplayable—that is, for example, if the player's first stroke be lost or deemed unplayable, he returns to the place from which he played it, adds a penalty stroke to his score, and plays 3 from that location. Rule 29 so provides.

Ball Out of Bounds

Now granted that the basic penalty for a ball lost or unplayable must be stroke and distance, how about a ball out of bounds?

Consider a case in which Smith plays Green at match play. Smith's drive fetches up in an unplayable lie. He elects to return to the tee and proceed under a stroke-and-distance penalty, playing 3.

Green, his opponent, hits his drive out of bounds. If the penalty for a ball out of bounds were loss of distance only, Green would return to the same tee and play 2.

Thus, Smith, whose first shot was on the course but unplayable, would play 3 off the tee, whereas Green, whose first shot was off the course (theoretically the worst shot that could be made), would play 2 from the same tee.

When the penalties are dissimilar and a ball is lost near a boundary, there often is a tendency to declare, without proper

search, that the ball is out of bounds (if the penalty is distance only instead of lost (stroke and distance). Such doubtful cases are almost impossible to adjudicate fairly. They have created problems which ought never arise in golf.

It is plain to see why the penalty for a ball out of bounds has now been changed in the new code to stroke and distance—see Rule 29-1. It is equally plain why a note to the Rule provides:

"The penalty stroke provided for in Rule 29-1 may not be remitted by Local Rule".

Restrictions on Committees

What has been said of the interrelation among balls lost, unplayable or out of bounds is true of all Rules to greater or less degree. The new code is a unified, integrated code. Its various parts have been carefully correlated. It is based on long experience the world over—experience which no one local committee could possibly have. No fundamental of the Rules can be disregarded without upsetting the balance with other features.

The foregoing are among the reasons why the following provisions appear in the new Rules:

Rule 11-3: "If play be conducted other than in accordance with the Rules of Golf, the (USGA) Rules of Golf Committee will not give a decision on any question".

Rule 36-5: "The (local) Committee has no power to waive a Rule of Golf".

Rule 36-7a, b: "The (local) Committee shall make Local Rules for abnormal conditions, having regard to the policy of the Governing Authority of the country concerned as set forth in the Appendix attached to these Rules.

"A penalty imposed by a Rule of Golf shall not be waived by a Local Rule".

The Rules are designed to work the maximum in fair play.

In the last analysis, the answer lies not in what is written in the book but in what is practiced on the course. Only the player and the committee can bring about fair play.

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