

Rule about Obstructions

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It was a sad, sad story the new golfer was telling:

"My drive was right down the middle," he said; "one of the few I hit in the fairway all day. But I found the ball nestling against a water outlet.

"Well, I tried to hit it with my number three iron. Not only was it a punk shot, but I broke my club, and it was a new one."

"But why didn't you lift the ball?" his friend asked.

"Lift it? I thought you had to play the ball as it lies all the time."

That's a good, safe way to start life as a golfer—to play the ball as it lies. But the fact is that there are times when the ball may be lifted and its position improved, without penalty.

The average golfer is inclined to regard the Rules of Golf as being mainly prohibitions and obligations—you can't do this and you must do that. But that dim view is an uninformed view.

The Rules contain a great many rights and privileges which can be appreciated only by reading the code. An important Rule in this respect is the one which the new golfer in the sad incident above could have invoked but did not—Rule 31, dealing with obstructions. This rule is a prolific source of questions submitted to the USGA.

Artificial or Natural?

It should first be understood what is meant by the term "obstruction". Definition 20 in the Rules provides:

"An 'obstruction' is anything artificial, whether erected, placed or temporarily left on the course.

"When walls, fences, stakes, railings or similar objects define the boundaries of the course, they are not obstructions, nor are artificially constructed roads and paths anywhere."

Thus, obstructions include such things as:

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| pipes | water outlets | buildings |
| vehicles | bottles | shelters |
| paper | rakes | hoses |

The Rules make a distinction between *artificial* things (which are obstructions) and *natural* objects. For example, Definition 17 describes loose impediments as follows:

"The term 'loose impediments' denotes natural objects not fixed or growing or adhering to the ball, and includes stones not solidly embedded, leaves, twigs, branches and the like, dung, worms and insects and casts or heaps made by them."

In summary: An obstruction is an artificial thing. A loose impediment is a natural thing.

How to Treat an Obstruction

We are discussing obstructions here. Relief from an obstruction is provided for in Rule 31. The Rule has two sections.

The first section presents no problems:

"Any movable obstruction may be removed. If the ball be moved in so doing, it shall, through the green or in a hazard, be dropped, or on the putting green be placed, as near as possible to the spot from which it was moved but not nearer the hole, without penalty."

Suppose a rake has been left in a bunker. Your ball comes to rest against the rake. As the rake is movable, you may remove it. If your ball is moved in the process, you must drop it as specified.

The second section of Rule 31 deals with *immovable* obstructions:

"If a ball lie on or touch an immovable obstruction, or if a player's stance or stroke or the backward movement of his club for the stroke be interfered with by any immovable obstruction which is within two club-lengths of his ball, the ball may be lifted without penalty and, through the green or in a hazard, dropped, or on the putting green placed, not more than two club-lengths from that point of the obstruction nearest which the ball originally lay, and must come to rest not nearer the hole."

When the Rule Applies

In the first place, we may apply the Rule if the ball *lies on* or *touches* an *immovable* obstruction.

Or, secondly, we may apply the Rule when *all three* of the following conditions exist:

1. There must be interference with the player's stance or stroke or the backward movement of his club for the stroke.

2. The interference must come from an obstruction which is immovable.

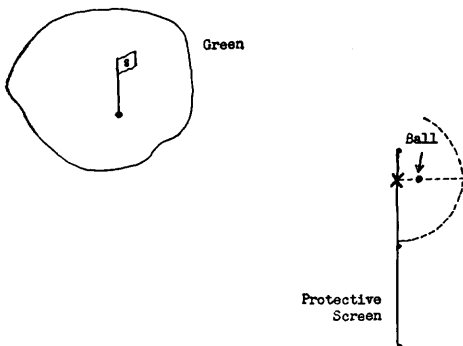
3. The obstruction must be within two club-lengths of the ball.

If any one of those three conditions is not present, you can't invoke this section of the Rule.

But assuming all three conditions do exist, what relief does the Rule allow? Well, you may lift the ball, without penalty. Then, everywhere except on the putting green, you *drop* it within two club-lengths of *that point of the obstruction nearest which the ball originally lay*, and it must come to rest not nearer the hole. On the putting green you *place* it as described above.

Note that you don't drop it within two club-lengths of where the ball originally lay. Suppose the ball originally lay a club-length from a protective screen which interfered with your backswing. If you were allowed to drop it within two club-lengths of where it originally lay, you might drop it a total of three club-lengths from the screen.

To make matters uniform and fair, the Rule requires dropping the ball within two club-lengths of *that point of the screen nearest which the ball originally lay*. Here is an example:



Point X is that point of the screen nearest which the ball originally lay. You are allowed to drop within two club-lengths of that point, not nearer the hole than where the ball first lay. Thus, if the

straight dotted line is two club-lengths long, you may drop the ball anywhere within the territory bounded by the curved dotted line, provided the ball comes to rest not nearer the hole than its original position. You may *not* measure *through* the obstruction in determining where to drop within two club-lengths.

Boundary Stakes Not Obstructions

Under Definition 20, stakes or similar objects used to mark out of bounds are *not* obstructions. Therefore, they may not be pulled up. If they interfere with a stroke or stance, there is no free relief from them. This is a change in the Definition this year. Heretofore a boundary stake was an obstruction.

Why the change? Various means are used to define boundaries: stakes, fence posts and so forth. Sometimes, on a single hole, part of a boundary is marked by a fence and part by stakes. It is considered advisable to treat them uniformly. Since the inside edge of stakes and fence posts at ground level determines the line of bounds (Definition 21), the stakes and posts themselves are out of bounds. Rule 31 applies only to obstructions *on* the course.

Further, if boundary stakes were classified as obstructions, some might be removed to enable a player to play a stroke, and the player might neglect to have them replaced. Thus, the competitors in a tournament might not play a uniform course.

It was therefore felt that classifying out-of-bounds stakes as non-obstructions would discourage tampering with them, would simplify the definition with regard to boundary markers and would help insure uniform playing conditions.

(However, stakes defining water hazards are obstructions under the Rules.)

Incidentally, some clubs set boundary stakes permanently in concrete, or use concrete markers. This prevents a fluctuating boundary and in the long run should reduce upkeep costs.

Following are some points about obstructions which have arisen under the new Rules:

"Golf House" Is for You

People drift into "Golf House", the new USGA headquarters in New York, on the average of three or more per day. Often men working nearby come in during their lunch hours. They have signed the guest book from 28 states and six foreign countries.

Our library is here for the use of golfers who would like to look up references or just sit down for a while and read. The other day J. F. Curtis, of Roslyn, brother of Margaret and Harriot, came in wanting to know when he played in a match against the Canadians. Mrs. Paul W. Adams, of Hartford, came to look up background for a Connecticut women's bulletin. A newspaper man from St. Louis wanted to write about "Golf House."

We have more than 750 books, not counting bound periodicals, dating from the earliest days of the game. We suggest that anyone desirous of contributing to this library write in advance, giving the name of the book and author, so that there will be no duplication.

James O. Burns, of Kenmore, N. Y., recently donated a ball which Johnny McDermott used in winning the Open Championship in 1912, to increase our collection of the memorabilia.

The USGA flag is now flying outside of "Golf House". It was donated by Isaac B. Grainger and the pole by James D. Standish, Jr.

A new idea for enrolling Founders of "Golf House" has come from Shepard Barnes, of Jersey City, N. J. He has made contributions in the name of his two young grandsons, Ross M. Barnes, Jr., of Detroit, and Charles W. Saacke, Jr., of Ruxton, Md. Mr. Barnes formerly was President of the Metropolitan Golf Association in New York and is a member of the USGA Handicap Committee.

Approximately \$20,000 is now needed to complete the purchase and renovation of "Golf House." Additional contributions to complete the fund are welcome, and any golfer, club, association or any-

one else interested in the game may become a Founder. Contributions should be addressed to:

USGA GOLF HOUSE FUND
40 EAST 38TH STREET
NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

Following are Founders not previously recorded in the USGA JOURNAL:

Frank Campsall, Jr.
J. E. Cummings
John McKinley
Mrs. Warren R. Pollard
Dr. A. G. Sacco
Morgan J. Seaton
C. Ross Somerville
Mrs. Otto Wenzel
William F. Zongker
Club

Berkley Hills Golf Club, Pa.

FOXBURG'S OLD COURSE

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ing only the original nine. The club purchased the original land, which it had been leasing, in 1924 and has since acquired some additional land to accommodate changes in the course. The original sand greens are now grass.

There are, of course, earlier references to golf in the United States, but none reflect the permanence which attaches to Foxburg and St. Andrew's. Rivington's Royal Gazette of April 21, 1779, a New York publication, carried an advertisement for clubs and Caledonian balls addressed "To the Golf Players," indicating some acceptance of the game here at that time. The South Carolina and Georgia Almanac of 1793 carried under the general heading "Societies Established in Charleston" an item entitled "Golf Club Formed 1786" and listed the officers thereof, and there were subsequent references in southern publications through 1811 to the "South Carolina Golf Club" and the "Savannah Golf Club." Russell W. Montague and four friends organized a golf club in 1884 at his summer home at Oakhurst, only two miles from White Sulphur Springs, W. Va. None of these endured, however. The first permanent golf club in this hemisphere was the Royal Montreal Golf Club, formed in 1873.