



# THE REFEREE

Decisions by the  
Rules of Golf Committees

Example of symbols: "USGA" indicates decision by the United States Golf Association. "R & A" indicates decision by the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, Scotland. "53-1" means the first decision issued in 1953. "R. 37-7" refers to Section 7 of Rule 37 in the 1953 Rules of Golf.

## Breaking Obstruction

USGA 53-3

D. 20; R. 17-3, 31-2

**Q:** A player's ball rolled in a tree basin of a young tree, which was held up by a large stake, or board. It so happened that the stake, but not the tree, interfered with the stroke. It was decided that, since the stake had been placed there by the green committee for course upkeep purposes, it was a movable obstruction and could be moved. In attempting to move it, however, the player found it was so solidly embedded it would not come out, so he broke it off. How would you interpret the Rules in this situation?

Question by: BRIG. GEN. S. E. RIDDERHOF  
NEWPORT BEACH, CAL.

**A:** The player had no right deliberately to break the stake supporting the tree. In doing so, he violated Rule 17-3, which provides in part that "A player shall not improve, or allow to be improved, his line of play or the position or lie of his ball by moving, bending or breaking anything fixed or growing", with certain exceptions not pertinent to this case. The penalty is loss of hole in match play or two strokes in stroke play for the deliberate action of breaking an immovable obstruction. However, if such an obstruction were broken accidentally, we would be inclined to take a more lenient view.

The stake was an immovable obstruction

(Definition 20). If the player's ball touched it or if it were within two club-lengths of his ball and interfered with his stance or stroke or the backward movement of his club for the stroke, he could have lifted without penalty and, through the green or in a hazard, dropped not more than two club-lengths from the stake, not nearer the hole, as provided in Rule 31-2.

## Lateral Water Hazards

USGA 53-4

D. 14b, c, d; R. 33-3

**Q1:** A lateral water hazard is on the right of the fairway. Player's second shot settles in the ditch but not in the water. The ball is practically unplayable, being on the opposite side of the water in a position where the club would have to dig through the bank of the ditch in order to reach the ball, and the ball would have to attain a very quick loft to clear the bank on the other side of the water. We have no markings as to where the water hazard starts or ends but there is plenty of water in the hazard.

If the player does not want to play the ball where it is, what is the proper procedure? Is it an unplayable ball or is it a ball in a lateral water hazard?

**A1:** If the water hazard was in fact a lateral water hazard, the player could have proceeded under either of the two options in Rule 33-3. A ditch is a water hazard (see Def. 14b). It should be emphasized

that the committee, in advance of play, should have defined accurately the type and extent of the hazards, as directed in Definition 14c and d. When that is not done, inconsistencies and unfairness can result.

**Q2:** In the Tampa Women's Open, Miss Betty Dodd hit a tee shot on the thirteenth hole that ran through the trap to the left of the green and went into a lateral water hazard. The ball crossed the margin of the hazard hole high.

The question was raised as to where the ball should be dropped. The ditch is about six feet wide and near where the ball went in is a bridge going to the other side. I ruled that the ball should be dropped on the opposite side of the ditch because to drop on the green side of the ditch would be a drop closer the hole. Was I correct?

**A2:** If the water hazard was a lateral water hazard, your decision was right provided it was impossible for the player to drop her ball on the green side (under Rule 33-3) without having it come to rest nearer the hole.

However, it is usually possible to conform with the Rule by dropping the ball within an arc of two club-lengths from the point where the ball last crossed the hazard margin.

From the description, it appears that the section of the hazard concerned was not a lateral water hazard (Def. 14c).

Questions by : CHARLES F. BAILEY  
TAMPA, FLA.

#### Defending Champion in Draw

USGA 53-5

R. 36-1

**Q:** Should a defending champion be forced to qualify in an inter-city tournament? There are four clubs represented. This question has also been raised in regard to the Washington State tournament, inter-sectional tournaments and private club tournaments.

Question by: MRS. FRED C. RUMMEL  
SPOKANE, WASH.

**A:** There is no pertinent Rule. The matter is up to the committee in charge (see Rule 36-1), and the committee should announce its decision in advance.

In a USGA Championship which has a qualifying round as a part of the Championship proper, the last previous winner

is not exempt from qualifying, as the event is a test of current ability.

If a defending champion who is exempt from qualifying elects to compete for a prize in the qualifying round, equity would seem to require that he forfeit his automatic qualification and compete on the same basis as all other competitors in that round.

#### Touching Soil in Bunker

USGA 53-6

D. 14a, 33-1

**Q:** While playing from a bunker on our course, a player permitted his club to touch a bare spot behind his ball and on his backswing. A penalty was immediately called on him, but in his discussions since he has placed his claim to immunity on the wording of Rule 33-lb. This paragraph says the player may touch any 'wall' of a hazard on his backstroke without penalty. The question becomes: what is a wall of a hazard? The bare spot touched by the player's club was a solid wall of clay at an angle of 45 degrees, not covered with sand although admittedly within the confines of the hazard.

Question by: HARRY WINTERS  
INGLEWOOD COUNTRY CLUB  
INGLEWOOD, CAL.

**A:** The player touched the ground in a hazard with his club in violation of Rule 33-1 and thereby lost the hole in match play or incurred a penalty of two strokes in stroke play.

Rule 33-lb does not apply; an embankment of exposed soil is not a "wall, paling or other fixed object" within the meaning of that Rule. Definition 14a provides in part: "A bunker is that part of a depression in the ground where the soil is exposed . . ."

#### Local Rule May Cover Retaining Wall of Gravel Path

USGA 53-9

D. 20; R. 29-2; LR

**Q:** We have a man-made path running from No. 1 tee down left side of fairway some 100 yards. The fairway slopes from left to right. The path is gravel and due to the slope a 1" x 6" board acting as a retaining wall has been built to hold in the gravel.

If a ball comes to rest in the path it must be played or an unplayable-lying penalty taken. But what is the ruling if the

ball comes to rest in the fairway but so close to the board that it cannot be played?

Question by: C. T. ROTHWEILER  
SAN ANSELMO, CAL.

**A:** The ball must be deemed unplayable and the player must proceed in accordance with Rule 29-2.

Definition 20 specifically provides that artificially constructed roads and paths are not obstructions, and retaining walls of the type to which you refer must be considered a part of the road or path. Therefore, relief is not available under Rule 31.

However, it is within the province of the local Committee to adopt a local rule providing that when a ball lies to the right of the retaining wall and is interfered with by it, the player may proceed under Rule 31-2 without penalty.

#### Fellow-Competitor and Flagstick

R & A 52-45  
R. 34-lb

**Q:** A and B were playing in a medal competition, marking each other's cards. On a putting green A's ball lies some 35 feet from the hole. B walks over and stands near the flagstick. A does not request B to remove the flagstick. A addresses his ball and putts. It is a good putt, and the ball goes directly for the flagstick. B moves over and removes the flagstick. The ball does, in fact, run directly over the center of the hole and comes to rest some four feet beyond it. The point the committee (of which I am a member) had to decide was whether B was entitled to remove that flagstick.

The decision the committee came to was: "that, but for B's action, A's ball would have struck the flagstick and come to rest in a quite different position from that in which it did come to rest with a penalty to A two strokes. Therefore B's action must be held to have influenced the position or movement of the ball (Rule 35-1g). B, therefore, incurs the penalty of two strokes. In other words, in stroke play, if a competitor does not ask for the flagstick to be removed, no other person should move that flagstick until the ball has come to rest.

Question by: PHILIP M. HANMER  
LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

**A:** Rule 34-lb: In this case it must be assumed that A approved B attending the flagstick and tacitly agreed to B removing

this if there was any likelihood of his ball, when played, striking it. In the circumstances B's action was correct and no penalty attached to either player.

#### Danger from Lightning

R & A 52-80  
R. 37-6a

**Q:** During a recent stroke competition there was a torrential downpour of rain and certain members considered lightning was imminent (having read the daily weather report that thunder was likely) and took shelter, which they thought was justified under Rule 37.

Others contend that the Rule reads "danger from lightning," not "danger of lightning". Therefore, despite the rain and the likelihood of a thunderstorm, players cannot consider there be danger from lightning until there is aural and visual evidence of thunder and lightning.

Question by: HAMPSTEAD GOLF CLUB  
LONDON, ENGLAND

**A:** Under Rule 37-6a, the player is the sole judge as to whether or not there is danger from lightning, and no action can be taken by the committee in relation to a player relying on this Rule. While, in cases of real doubt, players should be given the benefit, a committee would be entitled to refuse a player entry to a competition if it was evident that his "judgment" was obviously unreliable.

#### Recording of Handicaps

##### Responsibility of Committee

R & A 53-6  
R. 38-2b, 39-2c

**Q1:** In a Stableford competition the competitor's gross score is correctly recorded, i.e., 3. The bogey score for the hole is 3, but 3 points instead of 2 were claimed; the competitor was not entitled to a stroke at this hole. Should he have been disqualified?

**A1:** No. The competitor is only responsible that the gross number of strokes taken at each hole are correctly recorded on his score card (Rule 39-2c.) The Committee is responsible for the addition of scores and adjustment of handicaps.

**Q2:** Must a player record his handicap on his score card? Rule 37-4 and Rule 38-1 and 2 do not clarify this.

**A2:** No. The Committee are responsible. Rule 38-2b.

Questions by: NEW SOUTH WALES GOLF ASSN.  
AUSTRALIA