



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. "55-1" means the first decision issued in 1955. "R.37-7" refers to Section 7 of Rule 37 in the 1955 Rules of Golf.

Smoothing Hole on Green

USGA 54-28

R. 11-3,4; 35-1b, 36-7

Q: In a four-ball match A and B are partners and C and D are partners. A, before he putts, pats with his hand the inside edge of the hole, particularly the back edge in the line of his putt, and B putts after A on almost the same line. A has a 5 and B a 4, C a 5 and D a 4. Without penalty against B the hole is, of course, halved.

There is a local rule as follows: "Holes on putting surface may be repaired."

One question is whether smoothing out the inside of the hole is a violation of the rules.

Another question is whether A and B lose the hole because of a Rule violation, or whether just A, who has already lost the hole anyway by having a 5.

If A before he putts pats with his hand the grass in back and around the cup but does not put his hand inside the hole, would there be any difference in the ruling?

Question by: ROBERT F. SHEPARD
PROVIDENCE, R. I.

A: The local rule you cite is in conflict with Rule 35-1b and cannot be authorized under Rule 36-7. This Association will not interpret such local rules—see Rule 11-3.

Under the Rules of Golf, A violated Rule 35-1b when he touched the inside of the hole before his partner and he putted.

Smoothing the ground inside the hole can affect the line of the putt just as much as smoothing the surface of the putting green around the hole, and both actions are violations. The phrase "the line of the putt" is considered to mean not only the line the ball might reasonably be expected to travel toward the hole but also the ground around the hole and for such a distance beyond the hole as a missed putt might reasonably be expected to travel.

The penalty in such a case is applied to the owner of any ball affected on the side which violated the Rule, in equity under Rule 11-4, and is disqualification for the hole. Thus, if a claim was properly made under Rule 11-1, B was disqualified for the hole. Since A also putted on the same line, he technically incurred the same penalty although it had no effect in view of his score. C and D won the hole on D's 4.

In certain extenuating circumstances a player might be justified in discontinuing play and requesting the committee to have a damaged hole or putting green repaired. However, he himself may not make repairs on the line of a putt.

Supplement to Decision 54-28

R. 5, 11-4, 17-3, 35-1b, 37-2, 40-3g

Q: At the hearing of both teams by the Committee, two additional facts or statements were offered which might affect your ruling.

First: A stated that he "patted down some rough grass in the green, near the hole and did not touch the inside of the cup." This contradiction does not matter, as either is a violation and disqualified his ball under 35-1b. However, he had not "already lost the hole anyway by having a 5," as his first putt was for a 4, and his ball was still in contention at the time of violation.

Second: All four balls were on the same side of the hole in approximately the same line. A and C were well out with A farthest, both lying 3. B and D were closer, both lying 2. After A violated the rule by "patting the grass" he putted for 4, missed, and holed his 5. C did likewise, putting over approximately the same line. B and D then putted over approximately the same line also, both scoring 4s. Thus, any benefit that might have accrued to A's partner, B, by the violation also accrued to both their opponents, C and D, with no inequity. Therefore, the Committee could see no case "in accordance with equity" (Rule 11-4) to disqualify B's ball. The decision was made under Rule 40-3g for Four-Ball Match Play, "In all other cases (except those specified) where, by the Rules of Golf, a player would incur a penalty, the penalty shall not apply to his partner," and B's ball was allowed a half in 4.

In view of this additional information I ask your further consideration of the question.

Question by: EDWIN H. VARE, JR.
MERION, PA.

A: As noted in Decision 54-28, the "line of the putt" means not only the line which either partner's ball might reasonably be expected to travel toward the hole but also the ground around the hole and for such a distance beyond the hole as a missed putt might reasonably be expected to travel.

It is a question of fact whether the spot on the green which A touched was so remote from the probable path of B's ball that A's action could not possibly affect B's play. The Committee in charge must determine this question.

If B's line of putt was touched by A, B as well as A was disqualified for the hole. Rule 40-3g cannot relieve B of the penalty provided for in Rule 35-1b; it is superseded by the equity of the situation, and Rule 11-4 prevails.

Moreover, A, as B's partner, is always acting in B's behalf. The player himself (B, in this case) does not have to take action in order to incur a penalty. The acts of his partner or either of their caddies, as a part of his side, automatically become the acts of a player with respect to any possible effect on the player's subsequent play of the hole; the same is true of the acts of anyone else whom the player may influence to serve as his agent, such as a golf course worker or other outside agency. (See Rule 37-2 as to caddies.) Rule 35-1b states that the line of the putt must not be touched, and it does not limit such touching to the player. The same idea is expressed in Rule 17-3, which provides that a player shall not ". . . allow to be improved" his line of play, etc.; this would cover improvement by the player's partner, who would be acting in behalf of the player.

In determining the matter, the Committee must disregard any effect which A's action may have had upon the lines of putt of C and D. The Rules do not prohibit touching the opponent's line, but it is contrary to good manners to do so. The sportsmanship of golfers makes it unnecessary to protect one player against his opponent damaging the line of the player's putt. If an opponent deliberately affect a player's line of putt, we would uphold a claim that the opponent lost the hole, under Rule 11-4 and Rule 5.

Caddie Conceals Information, Player Responsible

USGA 54-33

R. 4, 21-1, 21-3, 23-4, 26-2 or 3, 29-1, 30-2, 37-2, 40-3f, 41-6, 41-7

Q.1: A drove off No. 7 tee and his ball landed on a road, which skirts the right-hand side of the fairway. The road in question is not out of bounds, but the ground across the road is. The four play-

ers saw the ball bounce off the road and presumably go out of bounds. A played a provisional ball. On arrival at the spot the caddie informed them that the ball was lying in the road, but he did not know how it got there. After some discussion the players allowed A to play the ball from the road and this was done successfully, the ball arriving in front of the green. However, after this ball had been played a lady who lives in a house across the road informed the players that the ball had been out of bounds in her garden and she had thrown the ball onto the road to avoid the caddie entering her property, at the same time telling the caddie what she had done.

Should the ball be declared out of bounds and should the hole have been played out with the provisional ball? A neglected to play the provisional ball.

My decision was that his ball was disqualified for that hole and, had they been playing in a stroke play tournament, A would have been disqualified.

The point A raises is that he was not playing in competition and as his opponents agreed to let him play the ball from the road he was within his rights. To this I pointed out that players cannot agree to waive a Rule of Golf.

A.1: The statement of facts indicates that A's original ball came to rest out of bounds, was thrown back in bounds and his caddie knew these facts and concealed them from the players.

Rule 37-2 requires that A assume responsibility for his caddie's action in misrepresenting the facts.

A thus played a wrong ball from the road, and incurred a penalty of disqualification for the hole in four-ball match play under Rule 40-3f or two strokes in four-ball stroke play under Rule 41-6. Neither penalty extended to his partner.

Further, in stroke play A would be required to play out the hole with the provisional ball, which became the ball in play when the original ball came to rest out of bounds, in accordance with Rule 21-1 and Rule 30-2, in the event that he desired a score for the hole. If this ball had been picked up, A would have to put it back

into play, as set forth in Rule 21-3, with an additional penalty of two strokes under Rule 23-4, in order to obtain a score for the hole. See also Rule 41-7.

The Rules of Golf apply uniformly in competition or informal play. Rule 4 prohibits players from agreeing to exclude the operation of any Rule or Local Rule, under penalty of disqualification of all concerned. If players modify the Rules in informal play, the game becomes something other than golf.

This interpretation of the Rules is based on the understanding set forth in the first paragraph. Under normal circumstances the rule of equity would preclude the imposition of a wrong-ball penalty when neither the player, his partner or their caddies had any way of knowing that his ball had been moved by an agency outside the match and was not properly in play.

Moving or Bending

R & A 54-48
R. 17-2, 3

Q 1: When stance is interfered with by a small shrub or bush, say one foot high, is one allowed to bend bush and stand on it, so long as one does not break it?

A 1: Interference with a growing object (bending or breaking) is permitted only if this is the natural consequence of taking up a normal stance and not if the bush is bent so as to improve the line of play, the lie of the ball or the stroke.

Q 2: When stance is under a tree with overhanging branches, is caddie allowed to hold branch back without breaking branch?

A 2: No. The player must make the stroke unaided. Rule 17-3 applies.

Q 3: When ball is lying in long grass, is one permitted to part the grass behind the ball without disturbing the lie, so as to obtain view of the ball?

A 3: Only so far as is necessary to identify the ball. As laid down in Rule 17-2, "the player is not of necessity entitled to see the ball when playing a stroke."