



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. "59-1" means the first decision issued in 1959. "D" means definition. "R. 37-7" refers to Section 7 of Rule 37 in the 1959 Rules of Golf.

Breaking Grass

USGA 59-28
R.17-3

Q: A is playing B in the club championship, match play. A has a good lie in the fairway. While pondering his next shot, he reaches down beside his ball, plucks a blade of grass and places it in his mouth. In no way did he improve his lie.

B then invoked Rule 17-3 and took the hole.

Was B right?

Question by: JOHN MARSHALL
Rices Landing, Pa.

A: No. According to your statement, A did not "improve . . . his line of play or the position or lie of his ball."

Holding Flagstick on Short Putt

USGA 59-26
R. 34-2

Q: Rule 34-2 appears quite clear. However, on several occasions where the player's ball has stopped within a few inches of the hole, the player himself has held the pin with one hand while he putt-ed the ball with the other. This player's

ball then would strike the flagstick. It appears then that the normal penalty for this violation is in order. Many people argue that this case is different. Your comments would be appreciated.

Question by:
BRIG. GEN. STANLEY J. RIDDERHOFF
Newport Beach, Cal.

A: Holding the flagstick constitutes attending it. It is a violation of Rule 34-2 for a player's ball to strike an attended flagstick, and the penalty is loss of hole in match play or two strokes in stroke play. If it were otherwise, the way would be open for a player unfairly to adjust the flagstick.

Exempt Competitors Seek Medal

USGA 59-27
R. 36-1

Q: In a flight of 16 players where you have seeded four people, may these four try on qualifying day for medalist?

Question by: MRS. LOUIS K. CASSETT
St. Louis, Mo.

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.

If the four exempt players elect to compete for a prize in the qualifying round, equity would seem to require that they forfeit their automatic qualification and compete on the same basis as all other competitors in that round.

When Ball is Holed

USGA 59-29

D. 20; R. 16, 23-3, 31-1, 34-4

Q1: One of our players chipped a ball onto the green. It came to rest against the flagstick. The player ran up, pulled the flagstick, and the ball came out with the flagstick.

Her opponent told her to putt it out, which she did. She must count the putt, but does she have to add a penalty?

A1: We understand that the ball as it rested against the flagstick did not lie within the circumference of the hole and all of it was not below the level of the lip of the hole; it therefore was not holed—see Definition 4. We further understand that the player, in pulling the flagstick, moved the ball.

Since the flagstick is an obstruction (Definition 20), Rule 31-1 would govern and there would be no penalty. The ball must be replaced on the lip of the hole.

If the ball had fallen into the hole with the removal of the flagstick, the player would be considered to have holed on his last stroke (see Rule 34-4).

Q2: If she picked up the ball as it rested against the flagstick and counted it as in, would she have incurred a penalty of two strokes in medal play or loss of hole in match play?

A2: Yes. See Rule 16 and, for stroke play, Rule 23-3.

Questions by: MRS. RINDA J. STURGIS
Canton, Ohio

Ball Unplayable: Choices

USGA 59-30

D. 30; R. 29-2

Q: A golfer hit her drive off of a tee. The ball lodged in tree roots in the rough. The player chose to try to hit the ball out and stroked at it but missed it completely. She then went back to the tee and played 4 from the tee.

Rules Committee No. 1 said that was wrong, that after whiffing she could

count the whiff as one of the two penalty strokes, drop back and be shooting 4.

Rules Committee No. 2 said she could not go back to the tee but was forced to drop back, counting the whiff as stroke two, taking the two-stroke penalty under Rule 29-2b and be shooting 5. She could not go back to the tee and take stroke and distance but must take the two-stroke penalty because stroke two, even though she did not hit the ball, gave her no place to go back to.

Rules Committee No. 3 said the player had to count the whiff as stroke two and then had the choice of either going back to the tee and hitting 4, or dropping back, counting the whiff as 2, then the two-stroke penalty and be shooting 5; and that she was OK when she went back to the tee and counted her stroke from the tee as No. 4.

After much discussion Rules Committee No. 2 ruling was accepted. Her reasoning was that the player could not go back to the tee because she had taken the second stroke at her ball even though she did not move it and thereby lost her right to go back to the tee.

Question by: MRS. FRANK R. LOVELL
Southfield, Mich.

A: Rules Committee No. 2 was generally correct.

Technically, the player had two alternatives under Rule 29-2:

(a) She could under other circumstances drop a ball under penalty of one stroke, and play her fourth stroke, as nearly as possible at the spot where the ball lay when she made her second stroke, i.e., in the tree roots whence she had failed to dislodge it; or

(b) She could drop and play her fifth stroke, after accepting a penalty of two strokes, keeping the point from which the ball was lifted between herself and the hole.

However, in order to proceed under the first alternative, she would have to drop into a lie where she already had declared her ball unplayable, and so her only practical choice would be the second.

The player clearly made a stroke in her attempt to dislodge her ball from the tree roots (see Definition 30), and this not only counted in her score but also deprived her of the opportunity she had at that point to play again from the tee.

Rule 29-2a requires that she play her third stroke "as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was played . . ."

Time Limit for Claim In Stroke Play

USGA 59-34
R. 11, 33-2, 33-3

Q: On a par 3 hole a water hazard protects the putting green at the front and runs around one side of the green to the rear. The water hazard has not been classified as a lateral water hazard, and there is no published local rule pertaining to it.

In stroke play Competitor A's tee shot crossed the water hazard in front of the putting green and entered the hazard behind the green. It was not possible for Competitor A to observe Rule 33-2a by dropping a ball behind the hazard so as to keep the spot at which the ball last crossed the hazard margin between himself and the hole; the width of the water hazard and the proximity of out of bounds on the far side of the hazard prevented this.

Competitor A asked his fellow-competitor, who was the resident professional, if there were any special rule applicable to a ball in this particular water hazard. The fellow-competitor said it was the custom of the Club to treat it as a lateral water hazard (but there was no special rule to that effect, nor was any special rule published for the competition).

Competitor A thereupon dropped a ball on the green side of the hazard within two club-lengths of the hazard margin, in the manner prescribed in Rule 33-3b for a lateral water hazard, and scored 4 for the hole.

After Competitor A returned his score and had left the Club, Competitor C protested, claiming that Competitor A should have proceeded under the stroke-and-distance penalty provided in Rule 33-2b on the hole in question. Competitor C claimed that Competitor A should be disqualified under Rule 1, since his breach of Rule 33-2 was a serious one (see Note 1 to Rule 33).

The Committee did not settle the question at the time. Meanwhile, the results of the competition as recorded on the scoreboard were published in the press,

with Competitor A the winner and Competitor C second, one stroke behind Competitor A.

Competitor A was not informed of Competitor C's protest until three days after the event.

The Committee is aware of USGA Decision 57-20, which provides in part as follows:

"In stroke play, no penalty for a Rules violation can be applied after the competition has closed (unless wrong information had been given by the competitor). The competition is deemed to have closed:

- (a) Stroke play qualifying followed by match play—When the player has teed off in his first match.
- (b) Stroke play only—When the results are officially announced."

In view of the lapse of time since the original order of finish was published and the fact that the Committee did not let it be known that there was any question as to the outcome, should the competition be considered closed within the meaning of USGA Decision 57-20?

Question by: CLAUDE HARMON
Mamaroneck, N. Y.

A: It depends upon whether Competitor C's claim was made before the results were officially announced and whether the Committee considered the claim to be in force in the ensuing interval. If the claim was timely made, the Committee must dispose of it.

The purpose of Decision 57-20 is to establish time limits for application of Rules and penalties in stroke play (in the absence of dishonesty). If Competitor C's claim was made before the time limit—that it, before the results were announced—we believe it should be upheld and that Competitor A should be considered to have disqualified himself.

The information given to Competitor A by his fellow-competitor, the resident professional, is irrelevant. Such information could have been effective only if published as a local rule for the information of all competitors.

Competitor A could have protected himself against possible disqualification by playing a second ball as provided in Rule 11-5.