

THE RULES OF GOLF AND GOLF COURSE MAINTENANCE

by JOHN P. ENGLISH

The highest priority in maintaining a golf course for informal play or championships has to be assigned to the tender loving care of the turfgrass on tees, fairways, rough, and putting greens, and no Green Committee Chairman or Golf Course Superintendent should let anything interfere with the pursuit of this priority.

As with every complex operation, however, there are other priorities. One which ranks close behind, certainly, is that of maintaining a course so that the Rules of Golf can be applied easily and consistently to all predictable situations.

For a simple example, take the boundaries—the stone walls, fences, stakes and even lines on the ground which tell whether a ball is in or out of bounds. Golf courses which have clear-cut and complete boundaries are, sadly, the

exception. Members know that a ball in Farmer Jones' pasture is out of bounds, whether stakes mark the property line or not. Members know, too, that a ball over the stone wall on another hole is out of bounds—but what about a ball nestled on the inner side of that irregular, tumbled-down stone wall? Exactly what points on the stone wall define the boundary? Members generally drive no more than 220 or 230 yards at best, so the boundary stakes on still another hole are carried forward only about 250 yards, where the line terminates in open ground. Good enough for member play most of the time, but along comes young Jack Palmer, fresh from the tour, and pulls one 285 yards into the open ground somewhere beyond where the line terminates.

How does any Rules of Golf Committee

The boundary of water hazards (yellow stakes) and lateral water hazards (red stakes) should be precisely delineated and defined.



decide whether these balls are in or out of bounds?

These are elementary situations, to be sure. They can be seen and corrected by forward-looking Rules of Golf Committees just before championships. But Golf Course Superintendents who are knowledgeable about the Rules can greatly improve the course for member play and simplify occasional preparation for championships by adopting regular maintenance practices with the Rules of Golf in mind.

Definition 21 provides in part that: "When out of bounds is fixed by stakes or a fence, the out-of-bounds line is determined by the nearest inside points of the stakes or fence posts at ground level . . ." Referees in important championships and club members in friendly conflict are always entitled to a clear line of demarcation, along which they can easily sight from stake to stake or whatever and which extends even to those unlikely places where balls rarely—but sometimes do—come to rest.

It is a simple thing for a superintendent to establish a boundary with standard large white stakes and keep an eye on them from time to time, insuring that all are in place and in good order. Many do? Ail should.

This sort of thing is multiplied in more subtle and complex ways all over a golf course.

A superintendent, in his effort to maintain his course under the Rules, will be guided first by that basic Rule 36-6 which covers not only out of bounds but also other boundaries and margins and provides in part:

"The Committee shall define accurately:

- "a. The course and out of bounds.
- "b. hazards and lateral water hazards, where there is any doubt.
- "c. Ground under repair.
- "d. Obstructions.

Hazards, of course, start with bunkers, also known in the vernacular as traps. Definition 14 describes a bunker as "an area of bare ground, often a depression, which is usually covered with sand. Grass-covered ground bordering or within a bunker is *not* part of the hazard."

Both the Rules of Golf and sound maintenance call for such sand as may be in a bunker to remain within a clearly defined margin. Nature, through heavy rain storms, and groundsmen, raking hastily by hand or with machinery, tend occasionally to be forces in opposition.

When a substantial amount of sand has been washed out of a bunker or pulled out by a mechanical rake and a ball comes to rest on this sand, a Rules Committee may have another near-insoluble problem in determining whether the ball is in or out of the hazard. And, of course, there are limitations on what a player may do when his ball is in a hazard: He can't



Insuring all Out of Bounds stakes are in place and in golf course

ground his club, he can't remove loose impediments, he can't test the surface.

The golf-course superintendent with an understanding of the Rules can train his crew so that such situations rarely occur and certainly do not persist.

Water hazards and lateral water hazards (they are two different things) present a more complex problem. Rule 36-6B places on the committee in charge the responsibility of identifying not only the margins but also the types of hazards. Since these decisions represent judgment calls, the Golf-Course Superintendent is well advised to counsel with both his Green Committee and his Golf Committee.

Definition 14b says in part that "a water hazard is any sea, lake, pond, river, ditch or any other open water course (regardless of whether or not it contains water) . . . All ground or water within the margin of a water hazard, whether or not it be covered with any growing substance, is part of the water hazard . . ."

Since the definition clearly implies that a water hazard includes not only water but also a certain amount of dry land, its margin has to be delineated by something other than the water-line. Usually this delineation is carried out by means of short colored stakes or lines on



good order is a simple yet essential requirement of today's superintendent.

the ground or a combination of both. The margin normally is drawn to include in the water hazard not only all ground which is, or may at times be, covered by water, but also all rough, eroded ground along the banks which cannot be properly maintained for normal play. If a ball coming to rest on a banking of a water hazard might often be something less than playable, the custom is to include the area in the water hazard so that a player can operate under the lesser penalty of Rule 33-2 or 33-3, a privilege he would have if the ball had gone all the way into the water.

Having reached a decision on the proper margin for a water hazard, the Committee and Superintendent must then determine whether it is, in fact, a water hazard under Definition 14b or a lateral water hazard under Definition 14c. The difference is that a lateral water hazard is "a water hazard or that part of a water hazard running approximately parallel to the line of play and so situated that it is not possible to drop a ball behind the water hazard and keep the spot where the ball last crossed the hazard margin between the player and the hole." When such a situation exists, the water hazard, or a part of it, is declared "lateral" simply by changing the color of the stakes or lines which

define its margin, for example, yellow for water hazard and red for lateral water hazard. The different meaning of the stakes should of course be explained on the scorecard or on a sign on the tee. When a water hazard has been declared lateral, the player can proceed under Rule 33 with an additional option.

An alternative to the lateral-water-hazard device is to establish a ball-drop area in some central, fair position when, in the language of the USGA's recommendations for local rules in the Appendix to the Rules of Golf booklet, "it is not feasible to proceed exactly in conformity with the Rules." The delineation of a ball-drop area should be carried out by the superintendent quite specifically and clearly, and it should be maintained in such a way that a player, having accepted a penalty and dropped there, will have a fair shot.

While golf is played every day on courses where the water hazards and lateral water hazards are not precisely delineated and defined, this gives the members less than they deserve in the way of a complete golf course and can create insoluble problems for a Rules Committee in a competition.

Unlike the boundaries of the course and the margins of hazards, the limits of ground under repair need not always be drawn by the Committee or the Superintendent in order to comply with Rule 36-6c, although such delineation is advisable. Ground under repair, according to Definition 13 is "any portion of the course so marked by order of the committee concerned or so declared by its authorized representative. It includes material piled for removal and a hole made by a greenkeeper, even if not so marked . . ."

The best Superintendents look on ground under repair as an option to be invoked in an emergency, not an easy alternative to cleaning up the mess in the first place. Grass clippings, branches, stones and old lumber should not be left long where they might interfere with play, especially near putting greens. Drains which must be dug up should be filled in and levelled promptly. But newly seeded areas and sometimes newly planted trees are properly classified as ground under repair from which Rule 32 provides relief until ready for play.

Also, low, poorly drained areas on the course where casual water tends to accumulate after rains should receive attention because many players find it persistently difficult to apply Definition 8 and Rule 32 in ground which is somewhere between wet and muddy. Regular corrective maintenance over the year can simplify the consistent application of Rules.

A similar situation prevails with respect to obstructions, which a committee in charge of a course is required under Rule 36-6d to define

accurately where there may be doubt. In its technical meaning under Definition 20, an obstruction is anything artificial on the course, such as a bench, a protective screen, a fence, a Coke bottle, a rake—anything essentially made by man, as opposed to stones, branches and leaves created by nature.

The problem in defining obstructions arises from the fact that Definition 20 lists several exceptions to this otherwise simple statement. The exceptions are important and they provide that the following are not obstructions even though they seem to conform to the definition: "a. Objects defining out of bounds, such as walls, fences, stakes and railings (because they are off the course, not on it); b. Artificial surfaces and sides of roads and paths; c. In water hazards, artificially surfaced banks or bed . . . ; d. Any construction declared by the committee to be an integral part of the course (as, for example, a bank surfaced with railroad ties)."

The reason for the distinction is important. Rule 31 gives a player relief from obstructions, in strictly specified and limited circumstances, but not from non-obstructions, such as the cement-lined banks of a water course or the artificially supported bank of a tee. Where there might be doubt, the superintendent can help by getting a decision on the situation from proper authority and insuring that it made known.

Maintenance impinges on the obstruction Rule in another way, too. Rule 31-2b permits relief from an immovable obstruction under strictly defined circumstances and in very specific, if complicated, ways. Attention to the placement of these immovable obstructions in the first place, and to the ground around them where relief may be taken, again will ease application of the Rule—the intent of which, of course, is to provide some relief from the obstruction. Oftentimes there are options in the exact placement of an immovable obstruction, and the helpful Superintendent is one who evaluates the effect of relief under Rule 31-2b

before he makes the final placement and who maintains the ground around it with the same Rule in mind. After all, relief which requires a player to drop in a micro-jungle is limited relief indeed.

Good housekeeping and that other good quality known as common sense guide the scrupulous superintendent in many of the other areas where maintenance and the Rules overlap.

On slopes where balls may come to rest or roll, depending on the cut of the grass, for example, it is worth-while for a superintendent to think about the proximity of a boundary or hazard and whether balls should be allowed to roll naturally toward it with a short cut or restrained by grass allowed to grow a bit longer. The possible effects of dropping a ball on a slope in accordance with Rule 22-2 requires the same consideration. It is normally preferable, when possible, to maintain slopes where a ball may be dropped under any Rule in such a way that the ball has a good chance of coming to rest before it rolls into a hazard, out of bounds more than two clublengths or nearer the hole.

In bunkers where larger pebbles tend to work to the surface, maintenance with an eye to the Rules calls for their careful removal. Pebbles and stones are loose impediments, under Definition 17, and Rule 33-1 prohibits a player from moving one when his ball is in the hazard.

Along roads and paths, from which the Rules give no relief (unless a Local Rule is adopted), the same tenets of good house-keeping require that to the greatest extent possible edges and potholes be levelled and smoothed so that a player whose ball comes to rest on or against it can have a semblance of a fair shot without undue damage to his club.

If a superintendent remembers all these applications of the Rules while keeping the fairways green and full and the putting greens firm and true, he will be a gem indeed and a treasure to his Committee.

About The Author

John P. English is Director of the alumni association of Williams College, Williamstown, Mass., and past Assistant Executive Director of the USGA (1948-1959). He has written many articles on golf, participated in a number of golf association and conference programs as well as radio and television commentary. He is past President of the Massachusetts Golf Association. As a recognized authority on the Rules of Golf, he also has a keen interest in the care and conditioning of golf courses.

