

Great Golf Courses of America



Hells Half Acre, Pine Valley, N.J.

Great Golf Courses and the Rules of Golf

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Last year the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews elected Roberto DeVicenzo an Honorary Member, a tribute paid to a very few "distinguished professional golfers." When Roberto appeared at the British Open Championship in July, he proudly wore his R&A club tie. The R&A is regarded by much of the golf world as the authority in Rules of Golf matters, so Roberto said with a twinkle and a flip of his tie, "Now I make my own rules—so tomorrow I shoot 64."

There was more truth than jest in that. If players could devise their own rules as they go along, the leading money-winner might be the cleverest rogue.

But tournament golfers and championship committees want fair rules that are enforced strictly and uniformly. The ideal course in terms of Rules of Golf

purity probably would have nothing on the back of the score card except "USGA Rules Govern Play." The players would go at it with just the basic Rules prevailing.

There is a scorecard almost like that at a course which many players think suitable for Utopia. It's Pine Valley, in New Jersey, near Philadelphia. By a quirk of fate, I have a Pine Valley scorecard here in my hand. All it says about Rules is this: "USGA Rules prevail—all sand playable as a hazard."

But the condition of the course is even more important than written regulations in play by the Rules. For example, are chronically damaged areas given the cover-up of treatment as ground under repair? Ground under repair leads to ball-lifting and change of the ball's position. That is contrary to the basic

principle of playing the ball as it lies.

Conversely, a well-kept course is a credit to the club, the superintendent and even the integrity of golf, no matter whether it is a championship test or a simple public course. In a word, the well-kept course contributes to the spirit of the game.

Objectives

Now in setting up a course for a Championship, there are three simple objectives in terms of the Rules of Golf:

1. Since a championship is a test of skill which should produce a worthy winner, the Rules should not soften that purpose and give undeserved breaks to inferior players.

2. The set-up should be fair.

3. The Rules conditions should be clear so that everybody is playing the same game. Questions of fact should be questions of fact, not questions of interpretation.

Applying the Rules

Let's see how the Rules book bears upon course preparation. Although most Rules are for players, many pertain to the course, so those in charge have an obligation to know where the Rules fit in with their work. First, let's consider the teeing ground and then the hole.

The teeing ground, in Definition 33, is a rectangle—but some superintendents don't seem to realize that it is two club-lengths deep. I've seen markers so placed that if you went back two club-lengths you'd be in the rough.

Even on proper teeing grounds, you sometimes can't take a swing from every part of the rectangle because bushes and tree limbs interfere. In a professional tournament many years ago, Jim Ferrier was penalized two strokes for breaking off a part of a tree branch that interfered with his backswing on

the tee. So tee markers are to be located so as to be fair to players, entirely aside from the tactical test.

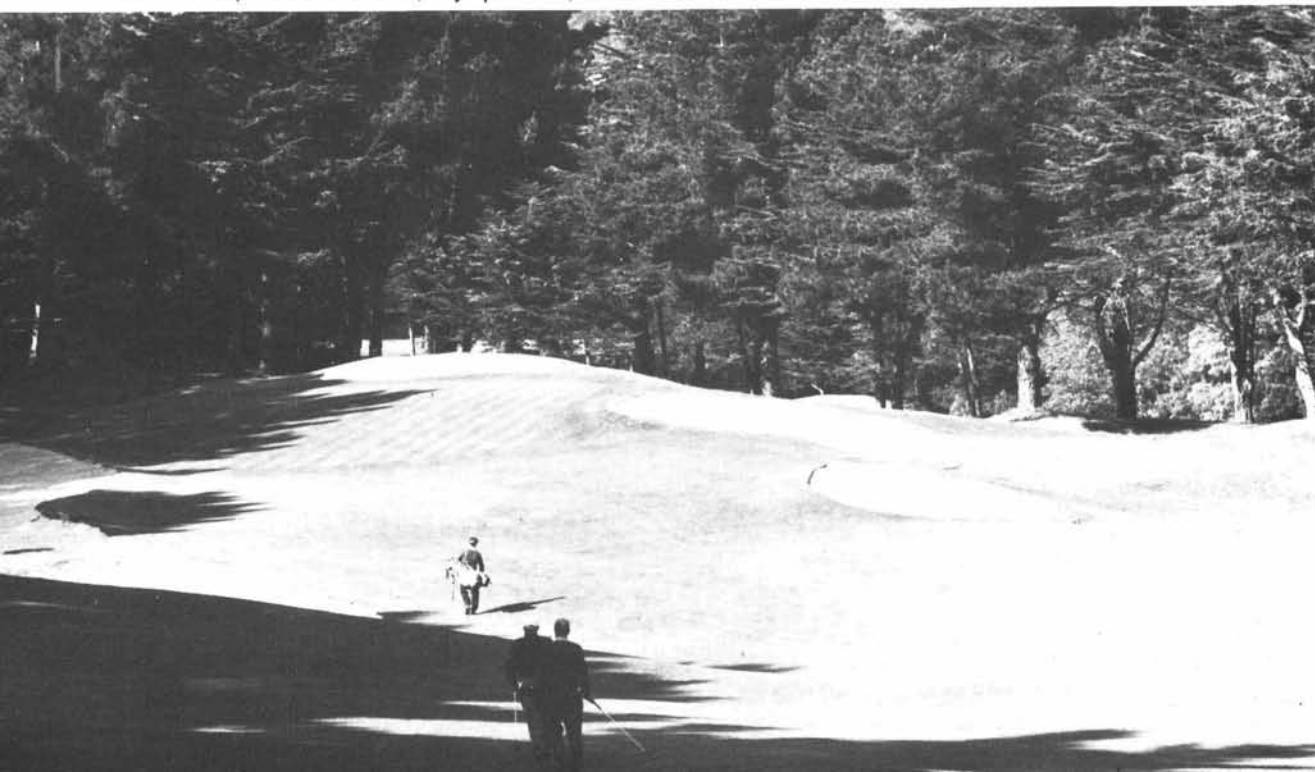
As for the hole, Definition 15 says it is $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter and at least 4 inches deep. If a lining is used (and when isn't a lining used?), it must be sunk at least 1 inch below the green surface (unless the nature of the soil makes it impractical to do so). If the lining is just a half-inch from the surface, the hole isn't legal, and the round isn't legal, and it may have to be replayed. We've all seen balls hit a shallow lining and bounce out of the hole. Cutting holes should be done by a responsible man who knows the definition of the hole.

Before long he may also have to be an arithmetician. When we fully convert to the metric system, the hole will become 108 millimeters in diameter, at least 100 millimeters deep, and any liner must be sunk at least 25 millimeters below the putting surface. The American size ball, not less than 1.68 inches in diameter, becomes 42.7 millimeters. There'll be confusion when a golfer is first confronted with the notion that he must get a ball 42.7 millimeters in diameter into a hole only $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter.

When a Championship Committee selects hole locations, the course superintendent can give very helpful advice that may save the day if there is heavy rain. What are the drainage problems? You don't want to risk having a hole under water—that may make the course unplayable and cause suspension or cancellation of a round. So the men who pick the hole locations must always have the Rules of Golf in mind.

For the flagstick, no size is prescribed in the Rules, but the USGA recommends that it be at least 7 feet high; the PGA Tour *requires* 8 feet, so players have a standard target, hole after hole, week after

The third tee, the Lake Course, Olympic Club, San Francisco, considered one of the great par 3s in America.





The Himalaya Hole, The Country Club, Brookline, Mass.

week. The USGA recommends a diameter not greater than three-quarters of an inch, from a point three inches above the ground to the bottom of the hole. Such a diameter theoretically allows room for holing a ball on any side of the flagstick. The play of the game could be affected by what flagstick is used. Flagsticks should stand upright but not stick when being removed. Who hasn't seen a flagstick pull up a hole liner?

Out of Bounds

In setting up a course, it is useful to refer to basic definitions in the Rules book. Definition 11 says that "The 'course' is the whole area within which play is permitted. It is the duty of the Committee to define its boundaries accurately." Definition 21 says that "'Out of bounds' is ground on which play is prohibited."

Most courses are not as fortunate as Pine Valley in having no out of bounds, so you must decide where play is to be allowed. Where club property limits are concerned, that's usually easy. Artificial boundaries inside playing areas are generally inadvisable. They usually reflect a weakness in course design which ought not be corrected by twisting the Rules of Golf. However, it is often wise to put out of bounds automobile parking areas, the clubhouse, equipment buildings, tennis courts, swimming pools and the like. If those things are near playing areas, they sometimes are treated as obstructions, from which a free drop is allowed. The point is: The course must be inspected carefully and a policy decision made before marking the boundary.

The player must be able to know readily whether his ball is in or out of bounds—the difference is a penalty of stroke and distance—so boundaries must be defined precisely. Existing walls and fence posts usually do the job well. If anything else is needed, stakes and lines of paint on the ground are used. Stakes are good because they can be seen from a

distance; they should be sturdy, at least three feet exposed, painted white. Because stakes are often pulled up, the PGA Tour sprays white paint on the ground at the base of each stake, so the location of a missing stake may be readily known.

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, because golf balls usually rest on the ground. So the place where the stake or post contacts the ground must be clear and obvious. That's why fence posts—not just fences in the air—form the line. Trees are bad boundary markers because their trunks and roots usually are irregular where they meet the ground.

Easy sighting from one stake or post to the next is necessary. Underbrush and tree limbs should not obscure the line. It's better to thin out underbrush than move a boundary line closer to the playing area and thereby perhaps force shots out of bounds artificially. A policy of fair play gives all possible playing room consistent with the need for clear definition.

Boundaries must have clear beginnings and endings, and extend as far as necessary to deal with errant shots. A boundary should not be drawn merely hole high with a putting green and then dwindle to nothingness—it should either be carried well past the green or turned off at an angle and completed in that direction. If the ball is not out of bounds but is interfered with by a boundary stake or fence post, there is no free relief—the ball must either be played as it lies or be treated as unplayable.

If this seems overly fussy, suppose you had to rule on a ball between two stakes whose position you couldn't tell until you stretched a string between the stakes, and then it fell across the ball, which therefore was in play because *all* of it was not out of bounds. That has happened.



The third hole, Princeville, Hanalei, Kauai, Hawaii.

Free Lifting; Ground under Repair

Tournament players sometimes say that if they can get their hands on the ball, they can save a couple of strokes in 72 holes—all legitimately, without hanky-panky. The more legal opportunities there are for lifting a ball and dropping or placing it, the more likely they are to improve their position.

Therefore, the condition of a course has a decided bearing on application of the Rules of Golf. The wise superintendent corrects problems of drainage and turf loss. Loose impediments are removed from fairway and rough, where feasible, because there's a penalty if the ball moves after you move a loose impediment. Divot holes are top-dressed. If there's jungle growth near a water hazard which could raise doubt whether a lost ball were in the water hazard or outside it, that gets attention because the penalties in the two cases can be different. Where feasible, guy wires and stakes supporting young trees are removed to reduce free lifting and dropping. So on a course where day-to-day housekeeping is alert and clean, you normally play the ball as it lies—and that is the first commandment in golf.

But even with good housekeeping, artificial relief is sometimes needed for fair play. Excessive rains may produce casual water. Sodding for turfgrass lost in very dry or very humid weather may become ground under repair. Location of obstructions such as protective screens, shelter sheds and scoreboards may give rise to lifting the ball without penalty and dropping or placing it more favorably.

Now what is casual water? It isn't just mud. Definition 8 says casual water is "any temporary accumulation of water which is visible before or after the player takes his stance (and which is not a hazard of itself or is not in a water hazard)." It has to be visible. It's temporary, and therefore its margins fluctuate and are not artificially marked.

But ground under repair should be marked. There is a tendency to be too liberal in determining what is ground under repair. The term now covers a multi-

tude of course sins, even though actual repairs are not being made. Sometimes a series of topdressings can level a sick area enough to avoid marking it as ground under repair. You don't give relief from every possible bad lie or for inferior shots. So before a championship the course is examined carefully, preferably on foot, and a policy is fixed, and inspection is made before each day's play. The PGA Tour limits ground under repair to areas which may reasonably be in play, generally in the fairway or near the putting green—and rarely outside the gallery ropes.

The person marking ground under repair must know the Rule for relief from interference. Under Rule 32-2a for play through the green, the player finds the nearest point which is (a) not nearer the hole, (b) avoids interference by the ground under repair, and (c) is not in a hazard or on a putting green. Then he drops within two club-lengths of that point. The Rule is the same for casual water.

Thus, it is not advisable to mark individually several small areas quite close together if a drop of two club-lengths from the relief point of one area would result in interference by another area. In such a case, all the little areas close together are encompassed within one larger section. Marking is done with white paint and a paint gun.

Sometimes fresh bad patches occur overnight or during play. A committee representative may declare an area as ground under repair even if not so marked. But care has to be exercised to treat a championship field equitably.

Material piled for removal is ground under repair. Clippings from putting greens should either be deposited where no golf ball will find them or removed completely; otherwise, if clippings are deposited near a green, a player may get a free drop and a better lie than his shot merited. All material piled for removal should be removed as soon as possible.

Bunkers; Water Hazards

Now a word about bunkers. Definition 14 says "A

bunker is 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."

A bunker is a trap for the unwary. But it shouldn't be a place to pile up strokes needlessly, as when a ball is lost in bunker sand. That ought never happen. How to prevent it? Use sand which meets specifications approved by the USGA Green Section, and give fresh sand opportunity to settle and not be fluffy. Fresh sand ought not be introduced less than three months before a championship.

Lips of bunkers can force honest recoveries. At greenside, bunker lips fronting the green are at least four inches deep; no lips at sides and rear. The lips should be angled slightly toward the green, or else be vertical. They never should be undercut. Unplayable lies can result from undercut lips and from lips at sides and rear.

Bunkers are kept as nearly free of loose impediments as possible—that is, stones, twigs, leaves and other natural objects. In a bunker, touching a loose impediment with the club before the downswing costs two strokes in stroke play or loss of hole in match play. Stones are dangerous. Rakes should be placed outside bunkers where least likely to interfere.

Defining limits of bunkers is almost impossible, especially on sandy seaside courses. But the written definition of a bunker helps—bare ground, often a depression, usually covered with sand; grass-covered ground is not part of such a hazard.

There are only two other kinds of hazards in the Rules—water hazards and their variants called lateral water hazards. The same Rule applies to them as to bunkers, but there are additional procedures for relief from water hazards. The last point at which the ball crosses the margin of the water hazard is the starting point for determining where a ball may be dropped outside the hazard. So delineation of the hazard margin is fundamental.

The best way to define water hazards is with continuous lines of paint sprayed on the ground. Yellow is used for water hazards, red for lateral water hazards. The distinction is necessary because lateral water hazards provide several options for relief. Small stakes may be used instead of painted lines, with six or eight inches exposed.

If the bank of a water hazard is sharp and sheer, exact marking of the limits may be unnecessary, as long as the type of hazard is indicated by an occasional yellow or red stake.

Obstructions

A prolific cause of ball-lifting is interference by obstructions. They are described in Definition 20 as anything artificial, except objects marking out of bounds and a few other things. A championship brings with it many temporary obstructions for gallery control and communications, including television. They must be located so as to be unlikely to interfere with play. But since that is literally impossi-

ble, special Local Rules apply.

As for obstructions already on the course, such as sprinkler heads, shelter heads, and artificial roads and paths, the Rules of Golf give free relief from interference. But every club, in locating an obstruction should try to minimize the probable effect on play.

The Putting Green

Finally, having played our way past all hazards and obstructions and other snares, we arrive on the putting green. This is the scoring zone, the place which reveals most strikingly the skill of the superintendent, or his deficiency. The condition of the putting green has more influence on scoring and Rules application than any other single factor.

In preparing for a championship, the objective is firm, keen greens, on the dry side. They provide the best test, for both approach shots and putts. You want the approach shot to stay on the green because of the skill with which the player strikes it—not because the greens are soft. The terrible tendency is to overwater, and it usually weakens the turf. As Fred Grau once said, you play golf on turf, not on color. Soft greens—or "puddings," as Henry Cotton calls them—do not reward the skillful player over the inferior.

Several years ago at Muirfield in Scotland, a few days before a Ryder Cup Match in September, the putting greens were quite dry, very firm, and very true. I asked the superintendent, James Logan, when he planned to water. He gave a hard-nosed reply: "Not at all. Last Thursday I locked up the hoses for the winter." You'd be hard put to find better putting greens than Muirfield's.

Firm greens promote the spirit of the Rules. Much gardening takes place on the putting green—repair of ball marks, removal of loose impediments, including sand (which is not a loose impediment anywhere else on the course), lifting and cleaning the ball. Some misguided souls are even now campaigning for a rule to allow repair of spike marks. Well, keen, firm putting greens help the ball run truly and minimize ball marks and other damage, especially in the holing-out area.

Margins of putting greens should be clearly cut—a ball may be cleaned on the putting green but not on the collar. Old hole plugs are repaired.

Rules and Greenkeeping for All Courses

The superintendent who plays his course can appreciate the relationship between good maintenance and the Rules of Golf. The same Rules apply to daily play as to a championship, and so should the same greenkeeping practices. They make for better golf, more enjoyment, and greater appreciation of the game. They strengthen the life of golf and the love of golf and the integrity of golf in a club. It's not stretching things to say that they strengthen the club.

Under such a set-up, our good friend Roberto DeVicenzo won't have to make his own rules, for if he deserves a 64, he can make it fairly.