

TURF TWISTER

QUESTION: What is the USGA policy with respect to hole locations on the putting greens, particularly during tournament play?

ANSWER: Many factors affect selection of hole locations. The first and most important is good judgment in deciding what will give fair results. Do not be tricky in locating holes.

Following are specific points:

1. Study the design of the hole as the architect intended it to be played. Know the length of the shot to the green and how it may be affected by the probable conditions for the day — that is, wind and other weather elements, condition of the turf from which the shot will be played, and holding quality of the green.
2. There must be enough putting green surface between the hole and the front and the sides of the green to accommodate the required shot. For example, for a long iron or wood shot to the green, the hole should be located deeper in the green and further from its sides than may be the case for a short pitch shot.

In any case, the USGA recommends that the hole be located at least five paces from any edge of the green. If a bunker is close to the edge, or if the ground slopes away from the edge, the distance may well be greater, especially if the shot is more than a pitch.

Consideration should be given to fair opportunity for recovery after a reasonably good shot that just misses the green.

3. An area two to three feet in radius around the hole should be in good condition without any steep slopes or, if possible, any changes in the degree of slope. In other words, the green in the holing-out area should be as nearly level as possible and of uniform grade, but it need not be exactly level. In no case should holes be located in tricky places, or on sharp slopes where a ball can gather speed. A player above the hole should be able to putt with a reasonable degree of boldness, and not purely defensively.
4. Consider the condition of nearby turf, especially taking care to avoid old hole plugs which have not completely healed.
5. Holes should be cut as nearly on the vertical as possible, not plumb with the contour of the green.
6. There should be a balanced selection of hole locations for the entire course with respect to left, right, central, front and back positions. For example, beware too many left positions with resulting premium on drawn or hooked shots.
7. For a competition played over several days, the course should be kept in balance daily as to degree of difficulty. In a stroke competition, the first hole of the first round is as important as the last hole of the last round, and so the course should not be set up appreciably more difficult for any round — balanced treatment is the aim. An old concept of making the course progressively harder round after round is fallacious.

One form of balanced daily treatment is to select six quite difficult hole locations, six which are somewhat less difficult, and six which are of moderate difficulty.

8. In early rounds, anticipate players' traffic patterns and avoid locating many holes where walking across the green by many players could spoil good hole locations for later rounds.
9. In match play, a hole location may, if necessary, be changed during a round provided the opponents in each match play the same location.

In stroke play, Rule 36-4a requires that all competitors in a single round play with each hole cut in the same position.

When 36 holes are played in one day, it is not customary for hole locations to be changed between rounds, but there is no Rule to prohibit. If they are changed, all competitors should be informed.

10. The greenkeeper who cuts the holes should make sure that the Rules of Golf are observed, especially the requirements that the hole-liner not exceed 4¼ inches in outer diameter and that it be sunk at least one inch below the putting green surface (Definition 15).
11. During practice days before a competition, it is advisable to locate holes in areas not likely to be used during play, preferably at the fronts and the backs of greens, bearing in mind the areas which will be impaired by foot traffic patterns.