

"WINTER RULES" FROM ALL SIDES

A Symposium

What Are They?

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Winter rules! What are they?

I presume they mean "preferred lies", for I know of no code for playing golf other than the Rules of Golf. To use the expression "winter rules" is as dangerous as it is confusing, because it implies the existence of a code that does not exist.

Let us be realistic and admit that, when we indulge in the privilege of placing our ball at will through the fairways we are not playing the game of golf, but a synthetic form thereof. One of the most fundamental rules of all is that which states, in substance, that a ball must not be touched or moved, except in the act of striking it. Proper exceptions are amply provided for under the rules.

I have no quarrel with a committee sug-

gesting, and even requesting, the use of preferred lies in the off season. I do object strenuously to such a practice when the course is officially opened for play in the springtime until it is closed to formal play in the Fall.

Opposed as I am to any deviation of play away from the rules, I would suggest this alternative to Golf Committees whose task it is, among others, to control the play of their membership. Schedule both the opening and closing of the course for regular play. During this period, it is to be understood that players are bound to conform to the Rules of Golf without exception. Beyond this period, and I bitterly dislike saying this, give them their preferred lies, if it seems wise to do so, but not under the cloak of winter rules.

How They Affect You

by HAROLD SARGENT

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World War II presented many problems to the game of golf. Most of them have since disappeared, but we still have with us a few of the wartime golfing habits tending to detract from the true spirit of the game.

One of the habits remaining with particular tenacity is that of playing what is commonly referred to as winter rules. This is, of course, the practice of improving the player's lie in the fairway.

Reasons For Winter Rules

There were two major reasons for the adoption and acceptance of winter rules, the first being the effort to save wear and tear on golf balls, and second, the curtailment of expenditures on the up-keep of golf courses. The former was necessitated by the wartime scarcity of rubber and the resulting government ban on manufactur-

ers, designed to conserve the existing supply. The latter became an important factor when, for a variety of reasons, many clubs found it impossible to maintain their courses in pre-war condition.

During the war, these conditions constituted valid reasons for the practice of playing winter rules. However, there is now no reason for compromising the basic principle of golf, that is, "Nothing may be done to improve your lie." This principle has always been a prominent tradition, as well as a rule, of the game.

The relaxation of emphasis on this principle has resulted in countless disagreements and strained relationships among golfers. These conditions must become a sad, but inevitable part of the game when equity, the basic principle and foundation of the rules of golf, is violated.

What Does It Do To You?

However, for the moment, let's forget about violating the code and tradition of golf. What does it do to you, the golfer, and to your ability, to play golf by winter rules? In the long run, there can be no question that your ability suffers. All who have played the game of golf have had the experience of finding their ball in a close lie. When this happens it's only human nature to bemoan fate and yearn for a better lie. However, most golfers have found that by concentrating on making the shot it can be successfully played. In fact, one of the real pleasures of golf comes from making a fine shot from a close lie. On the other hand, those who have played winter rules and taken advantage of a preferred lie have realized the experience of being lulled into a relaxation of concentration. The result is, of course, a poorly played shot.

The improving of your lie can also hurt the fundamentals of your swing. For instance, when the ball is teed up in the grass, it is much more difficult to put the back-spin on it required to make it stop. As a matter of fact, the opposite happens most of the time and a high, floating shot is hit. Upon landing it continues to roll, sometimes running completely over the green.

If the ball had been lying close, it would have been necessary to hit down on the ball, catching it first, then the turf. This would have produced back-spin on the ball and it would have been an easier shot to control.

How They Affect The Turf

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Improving a lie doesn't help the turf, but improving the turf helps the lie.

Frequently one hears a statement similar to this, "I would just as soon play the ball as it lies, but we observe 'winter rules' and improve lies at our club in order to save the turf." It is rather difficult to perceive how the improving of a lie will benefit

Natural Skill Is Lost

One of the cardinal fundamentals of placing back-spin on the ball is a steady head position. The weight should be slightly in front of the ball at impact and the



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hitting action of the hands should be delayed. It is normal, and natural, to delay the hitting action of the hands when hitting down on a ball in a close lie. However, if the practice of improving the lie is followed for any length of time, this natural skill is lost. It then becomes an effort, and much practice is required to regain this skill.

An added injustice is inflicted on golfers who persist in playing preferred lies. Once the habit has been developed, it is extremely difficult for these players to compete in tournaments where they would be compelled to play the ball as it lies. They are guilty of denying themselves the opportunity of developing a game worthy of tournament competition and are deprived of enjoying this phase of the game.

In the interest of maintaining the traditions of golf and for the good of our personal game, let's play the game by the Rules of Golf and abolish winter rules.

the turf. The reasoning is rather hard to follow.

If a piece of turf is thin and "cuppy", so as to afford a faulty lie, then it would appear that little further damage could be done by taking a divot from that spot. However, if the ball is taken from such an undesirable spot and moved a few inches

to a better piece of turf, then the divot will destroy that better turf. How has the fairway been improved? To ask it another way, how has the course been damaged less?

Mowing Problems

In some cases, grasses that are used on fairways will not thrive under very close mowing. This is true primarily where bluegrass and fescues are used. High cutting makes play from fairways more difficult, and it may be that one could find it more pleasant to play golf by improving his lie. In this case, the improvement of the lie does not help the turf, but the high mowing, which necessitates improving the lie, may enable the grass to maintain a better stand.

There would appear to be some degree of fallacy even in this thinking. High mowing may improve the stand of grass, but it does not necessarily improve the quality of the turf. Someone has said, "I want a turf I can play 'off of' and not 'out of.'" A philosophy that is rather widely accepted among golf course superintendents is the one that holds a fairway grass to be unsatisfactory if it cannot be maintained at a clipping height suitable for playing golf. When a dense turf cannot be maintained at a clipping height of 1¼ inches or less, it generally is believed that a different grass should be introduced. This thinking is demonstrated by the trend toward Bermudagrass fairways in borderline areas.

Golfers Whims Strange

To one interested in maintaining the turf on a golf course, the whims of golfers are often strange. It is generally recognized that one of the most difficult spots to maintain on the average golf course is the tee of a short par 3 hole where the tee shot is usually played with an iron. Such a piece of turf is literally chopped to bits. And a large percentage of the golfers do not use a wooden tee; they play the ball from the turf. Some even play wood shots from the turf. Why make exceptions to the rules to improve a lie on the fairway and then fail to avail oneself of an advan-

tage permitted under the rules when playing from a tee? Many a superintendent would be grateful if golfers improved their "lies" on such hard-to-keep tees.

The general use of "winter rules" leads to some rather odd practices in maintaining a golf course. It is considered to be all right to improve a lie in the fairway but certainly not in the rough. While the rules of golf make no such distinction, some differentiation between fairway and rough becomes necessary. Ordinarily differences in mowing height will serve to differentiate the areas, but sometimes, where turf is poor and thin, the line is barely distinguishable. To save arguments among players, some sort of demarcation is made. Sometimes this line consists of a shallow furrow plowed around the area designated as fairway, sometimes lime or chalk is used as a marker and, in at least one case, gasoline is used to burn out the turf along the line. In most cases, additional fertilizer or other improved maintenance practices would solve the problem because turf on the fairway would be improved and the need for "winter rules" would be eliminated.

Turf Maintenance Advanced

Turf maintenance has advanced remarkably in the years that golf has been played in the United States. Better equipment has contributed to lower scores, but better turf has also contributed to those lower scores. The demands of golfers for turf of higher quality has spurred developments in all phases of course maintenance. It is anticipated that those demands will continue and even increase. The typical modern golf course superintendent is a highly capable individual. If golfers support his efforts he will continue to improve the quality of their golf course.

It is usually considered that, if a golfer plays a course in par, at least 75 per cent of his strokes are taken from perfect lies. The other 25 per cent that are played from the fairway are the trouble makers when we come to the question of improving lies. Support of a fairway turf improvement program at your course can go far in the direction of pushing the percentage of perfect lies upward to 100.