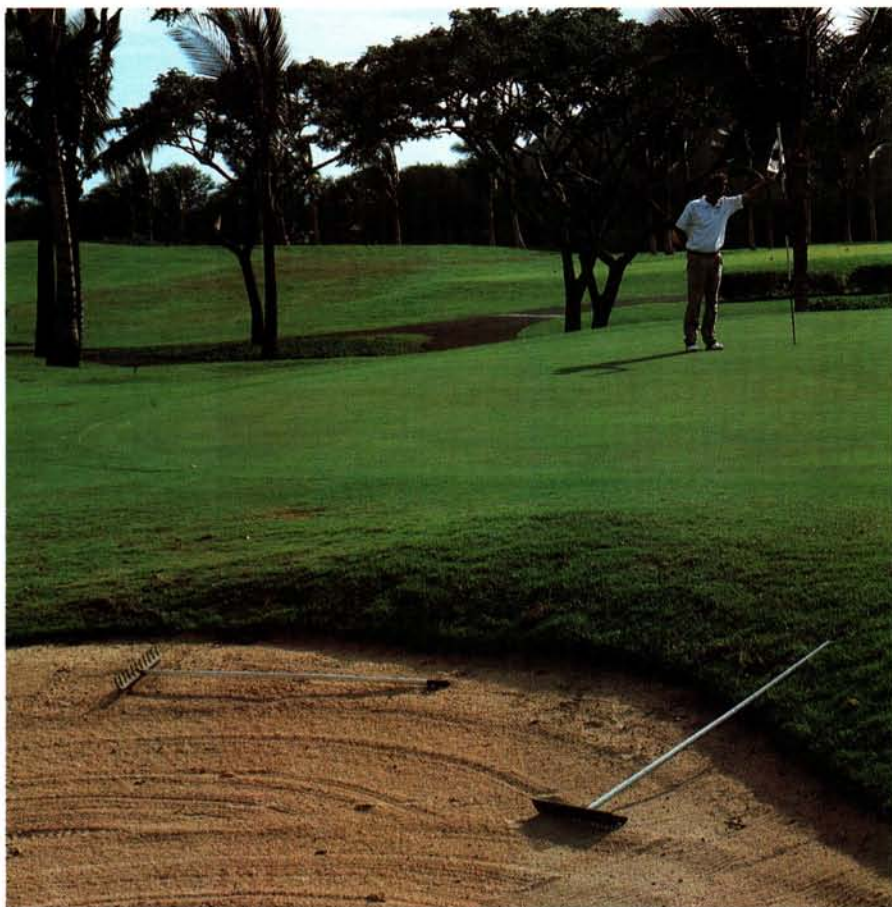


Where Should We Put the Bunker Rakes?

Proper bunker rake placement requires a review of the Rules and common sense.

BY MATT NELSON



A common question asked of USGA field staff is, “Where should the bunker rakes be placed?” Although there is no Rule that specifies whether bunker rakes should be placed in or out of the bunkers, a miscellaneous Decision on the Rules of Golf sheds useful light on this topic.

Decision Misc./2 recommends that bunker rakes be placed outside of bunkers in areas where they are least likely to affect play. The reason for this Decision has to do with Rule 24-1 and Rule 20-3d. If a ball comes to rest against a bunker rake, the rake may be treated as a moveable obstruction. This situation could occur where a rake is positioned on a steep slope, and when the rake is moved the ball rolls to the bottom of the bunker. If the slope is too steep or the sand too firm, it may not be possible to replace the ball on the original spot without it rolling away. It also is possible that all points of the bunker would be closer to the hole than the original position of the ball

when it came to rest against the bunker rake, and there would be no other spot in the bunker to place the ball without being closer to the hole (see Decision 20-3d/2). Nothing in the Rules of Golf allows a player to press the ball into the sand to make it stay in position. Therefore, since the player could not place the ball in conformity with the Rules, he would proceed under the stroke-and-distance option of the unplayable ball Rule (Rule 28a), or, in equity (Rule 1-4), drop the ball outside of the bunker, keeping the point where the ball lay between himself and the hole, under penalty of one stroke.

Obviously, the ruling is much simpler when a ball comes to rest against a rake placed outside of the bunker. For this reason, placing the bunker rakes outside of bunkers results in cleaner and less costly rulings.

There is no perfect answer regarding the placement of bunker rakes. Some players will always argue that rakes outside of bunkers can deflect balls into

the bunker. The maintenance staff that mows rough and green surrounds would surely rather see the rakes in the bunker. But when rakes are left in bunkers, they are commonly left near the edge of the bunkers where slopes are common and the ruling complications stated previously may arise. The best advice is to use common sense and place the rakes outside of the bunkers where they are least likely to affect the movement of the ball. Once the Committee decides where bunker rakes should go, the maintenance staff (and the golfers!) should be trained to put the rakes in the proper place.

Now, as bunkers are *hazards*, I suppose one great way to deal with this controversial issue would be to make one trip around the course with a pickup, collect all of the rakes, and . . . but this would be a whole new discussion, wouldn't it?

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Golf courses have been very creative in placing bunker rakes to encourage golfers to use them, with both good and bad results.

