

PLAYING BY THE RULES

When we think of rules and regulations, we often think of things that are penal and restrictive. However, sometimes the rules are actually there to help you! Such is the case with the game of golf. With the season well under way, I'd like to share some of those stodgy golf rules and how they evolved.

For three hundred years, golf was played with little or no organization and very few rules. Any rules that did exist were mainly local rules made up between friends and regular playing partners. The first rules were published in 1744 by the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers and were known as the "Articles and Laws in Playing Golf". There were only 13 Rules. The game, along with its equipment, has evolved over time, requiring rules to create consistency and fairness. The current USGA publication, "The Rules of Golf" contains 47 definitions, 34 Rules and 3 appendices on the local rules, design of clubs, and the ball.

Gary Wiren, PGA Master Professional and author of the PGA Teaching Manual, writes: "In addition to skill, success in golf lies in sportsmanship and fair play. It is a game which revolves around the concept of courtesy and proper conduct. It is a game which requires self-discipline – in the sense of control of individual emotions and also in the sense of integrity, because many of the rules depend upon self-enforcement."

The rules have evolved as a means of providing us with a set of guidelines as to what can and can't be done during play. Knowing and understanding the rules of golf and some common etiquette may well add to your enjoyment of the game and could even help to lower your score! Let's take a look at a few common situations.

Have you ever heard, "I'll drop a ball on line of flight" when a player can't find his ball? Many players unable to locate their ball will elect to drop a ball along the line of flight and add a one-stroke penalty to keep it fair. A similar situation often arises when a player loses a ball in the trees or rough. Even though this helps with the pace of play, it is not allowed under the rules. Rule 27-1, Ball Lost or Out of Bounds, states that a player must play a ball, under penalty of one stroke, as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was played. With this in mind, if there is some doubt as to whether the original ball will be found, it is always best to announce and play a Provisional Ball. If after 5 minutes of searching, the original ball cannot be found, a player can continue by playing the Provisional Ball, thereby taking the stroke and distance penalty.

Can you identify your ball? Are you sure? Suppose you and your playing partner both hit great drives and the balls end up close together in the rough. You arrive for your second shots, but aren't sure which ball is yours. Compounding the problem is that you are both playing the same brand and number ball. What's the ruling? You might be surprised to know that you **MUST** return to the tee and replay the shot under the penalty of stroke and distance. Rule 27 and the definition of "Lost Ball" states that if a player is unable to positively identify his ball, it should be considered lost. Both players must return to the

tee and play the shot again. The moral of the story is, always place an identifying mark on your ball!

Another situation that often confuses the player is hazards, which are defined by either red or yellow stakes. Hazard stakes are used to identify an area that may be difficult to play out of. If your ball ends up in the hazard, you may, by incurring a one stroke penalty, remove your ball from the hazard and play it from a specified area outside of the staked area.

It is important to know the color of the stakes and the procedure to follow. When your ball is in a yellow staked area, or a regular water hazard, you have three options: go into the hazard and play the shot (making sure not to ground your club before striking the ball), return to the spot from which you last played and drop a ball, or drop a ball no closer to the hole along the line formed between where the ball last crossed the margin of the hazard and the flagstick, going back as far as you want on the course. The first option of playing the ball as it lies, if possible, will save you the one-stroke penalty but may not be very good for your well-being!

When in a red staked area, or a lateral hazard, you have the same options available as in a yellow staked area, plus two additional options. You can choose to take the last point of entry and drop the ball within two club lengths, or go to a point on the opposite side of the hazard, equidistant from the hole, and drop a ball within two club lengths of that spot. In either case, you may not drop the ball closer to the hole than the point at which it entered the hazard. Knowing this fifth option can often leave you in a better position to play out the hole.

One question we are often asked is whether a player has to wait after his first putt to go again or putt out. Rule 10, Order of Play, covers this situation. In stroke play, you may proceed to hole out at any time, although out of courtesy, you should check with your fellow competitors and make sure you do not stand in the line of their next putts. In match play you must first get the permission of your opponent before putting out. If you don't, and you make the putt, they have the right to ask you to replay it. It is proper etiquette to putt out when you can, as it helps speed up the pace of play.

So that's just a sample of some of the situations that may arise on the course this summer. Knowing the rules and how to proceed on the course will not only increase your enjoyment of the game, but might even help lower your score. If you have any questions on the rules, please contact your PGA staff at the Heritage Golf Club. Alternatively, drop me an email any time. If you would like to test yourself and improve your knowledge of the rules, you may visit the USGA website at www.usga.org, and go to the rules section. They provide quizzes that will help you better understand the rules.

Doug Hodges is a Class A PGA Professional and founder of Creative Golf, an organization specializing in unique corporate teambuilding events that use golf as a vehicle to emphasize creativity in the workplace. Teambuilding events and weekend

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