



Blame It On The Committee

By David Finney, Golf Course Superintendent, Virginia National Golf Club

Editor's Note: Long time readers of The Grass Roots will recognize David Finney's name. His articles have appeared in this journal many times, always on the subject of the rules of golf. Among golf course superintendents, few are as well versed on the subject as Dave.

Since his last article, he has moved from West Virginia to Virginia and has been involved in the construction and grow-in of the Virginia National Golf Club, located in the mid-Atlantic part of the country about 40 miles west of Washington, D.C. It is set between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Shenandoah River at the site of the Battle of Cool Spring in the Civil War. It was designed by Jerry

Matthews of Lansing, Michigan. Thanks to Dave for sharing his expertise.

We as superintendents have our jobs to do, and sometimes our operations can be disruptive to golfers. Aerification comes to mind immediately as the #1 irritant to golfers, but we also take a lot of heat unnecessarily for construction projects, and sometimes even leaf removal in the fall tends to get in the way of a friendly four-ball event. Members and golfing guests always want to know, "What are you doing, why do you have to do it today (my day to play golf), and when is it going to be finished?" However, I can't think of a single maintenance function we perform where the golfer doesn't get

relief either under the Rules of Golf, or by local rule.

Let's take a look first at aerification. If a ball in play comes to rest in an aerification hole, is there free relief under the Rules of Golf? Unfortunately, no. However, the Committee may write a temporary local rule granting relief from aerification holes, as outlined in Appendix I, page 95 of the 2000-01 Rule Book. Aerification plugs are considered to be loose impediments, consisting of compacted soil, and the rules do permit a player to move aerification plugs away from the ball before making a shot.

Next let's consider Abnormal Ground Conditions (Rule 25), in particular let's focus on *ground under*

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repair. The *ground under repair rule* is one of the more generous rules in the game. Whether the lie of a ball, a player's stance, or his swing is interfered with by *ground under repair*, the player is entitled to free relief. There is no penalty stroke, and no loss of distance involved with the application of this rule. What happens however, if a ball comes to rest

in a bunker that you and your crew are renovating? Does the player get free relief outside the bunker from *ground under repair* inside the bunker? Once again the answer is no, unless the Committee gets involved. It is recommended that the Committee should, during the renovation period, define the bunker as *ground under repair* and classify it

as *through the green*. Only by doing **both** of these things is the player going to get relief outside of the bunker under repair.

Our final example involves the seasonal accumulation of leaves. Does the fabled leaf rule exist? Is a player allowed to drop another ball where his original ball entered a pile of leaves that your staff has created or hasn't cleaned up yet? Once again, the answer is no, unless the Committee takes action. The Committee must write temporary local rules declaring the seasonal accumulation of leaves to be *ground under repair* (Decisions 13-4/33, & 33-8/31). Without these local rules written by the Committee, a ball lost in a pile of leaves is simply a lost ball (Rule 27-1: stroke and distance), and touching leaves in a bunker on your backswing invokes *the general penalty* for touching a loose impediment in a bunker (Rule 13-4).

It is our responsibility as golf course superintendents to relay pertinent information to the Committee, informing them about conditions such as aerification, construction projects, or leaf accumulations on the golf course. The Rules of Golf define the Committee as the Committee in charge of the competition, or if the matter does not arise in a competition, the Committee in charge of the golf course. This definition might apply to a Championship Committee, a Tournament Committee, or simply a Green Committee. It is the Committee's responsibility to write local rules that will apply to your golf course. So when a player encounters scenarios similar to those we've outlined, if the Committee has **not** written the local rules granting relief from aerification holes, granting relief from a bunker totally under repair, or granting relief from the seasonal accumulation of leaves, don't blame the golf course superintendent. We are simply doing our jobs. **Blame it on the Committee.** ♣

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