

WHY SHOULD SUPERINTENDENTS KNOW ABOUT THE RULES OF GOLF?

By W. R. King, Mohawk Golf Club

The answer is really pretty simple: Because they create the **conditions** to which a great many of the Rules are directed. Sure, Superintendents have help (????) from many sources — like the weather, insects, disease, vandals and even members! But fundamentally the Superintendent is responsible for every aspect of the condition of the golf course and since many of the Rules of Golf are intended to provide relief to the player from those “conditions”, he should know the relation between the Rules and the “conditions.”

“Why are the Rules of Golf so strict?”

“Why, oh why, are they so complex?”

“After all, isn’t it just a game?”

Questions like these are heard almost any day around any Club. Richard Tufts, of Pinehurst fame, long a member of the USGA Rules Committee, espouses in his book, “The Principles Behind the Rules of Golf,” the belief that there would be a far more sympathetic appreciation of the Rules if more golfers **really understood** the principles behind the Rules — especially what he calls the **two great principles**. These are:

“1. You play the course as you find it.”

“2. You put your ball in play at the start of the hole, play only your own ball and do not touch it until you lift it from the hole.”

Examined on the basis of these principles, the Rules of Golf consist almost entirely of statements that either afford the player relief where it would be unfair or impossible for him to follow the “principles” exactly, or penalize him when he violates the “principles” — plus, of course, a few statements regarding procedures.

It would appear from this that the reason the Rules have become so complex and so strict is that golfers, through the centuries, have either demanded more and more relief, or devised so many ways to violate the principles that lots of penalties have had to be established — probably both!

Consider that if it were not for the Rules of Golf and the relief they afford, every time a player put his ball in some trouble spot, HE WOULD HAVE TO FIND SOME WAY TO PLAY THAT BALL FROM THAT SPOT NO MATTER HOW MANY STROKES IT TOOK HIM! And if he lost it, or knocked it out of bounds, he could go home and come back another day! I think Rules are better, don’t you?

Now, let’s examine how the relief afforded the player by the Rules relates to the Golf Course Superintendent. There are many sets of circumstances and I will discuss just a few of them in some detail.

Out of Bounds. When a player hits his ball out of bounds, the Rules permit him to play another ball, adding a penalty stroke to the one already taken, so he lies three after playing the second ball. But — was the first ball really out of bounds? If it came to rest near the boundary, and the boundary was not positively defined, it could be either inside or outside — and the difference to the player could be one stroke, or possibly two, which is not unimportant to him — and the debates could create acrimony and even destroy friendships! The point is obvious: The Superintendent should see to it that out of bounds lines are marked so clearly that there can be no doubt as to whether the ball is in or out.

Loose Impediments. These are defined as natural objects, not fixed or growing, like leaves, twigs, acorns, worms or their casts, etc. Such things may be moved by the players without penalty, except when both the impediment and the player’s ball lie in a hazard. So the poor fellow whose ball comes to rest against an acorn or a twig in a bunker has no relief — he must play it “as is”, acorn and all! Or he may call it an unplayable lie, take a penalty stroke and drop the ball elsewhere in the bunker. And he’s pretty sure to be unhappy about it, especially if such loose impediments are regularly allowed to accumulate in the bunker by the — you guessed it — Superintendent.

Movable Obstructions. These are defined as anything artificial that may be placed or left on the course, e.g., beverage containers, package wraps, tools, a golf club, a sweater, etc. Such things may be moved by the player anywhere on the course. There seems to be a bit of grim injustice here — if a player’s ball comes to rest against a beer can in a bunker, he may move the can without penalty, something he couldn’t do with the acorn. And the myth about the player who put a match to the paper bag into which his ball had rolled in a bunker is just that — a myth. So cans and cigarette packages are better than acorns or twigs? Well, yes, in terms of the player, but I’m sure no self-respecting Superintendent would allow them to accumulate — and my opinion of the player or spectator who tosses away such trash on the course would have to be rated “X”. Campaign against him!

Immovable Obstruction. Defined as artificial objects which can’t be moved, like a ball washer, a tee bench or a rain shelter. The Rules permit the player to pick up his ball and drop it within two club lengths of such an obstruction when it interferes with his stance or the area of his intended swing. But when such obstructions are, perforce, in an area where a ball might frequently be played, it would sure help if there were at least some grass within the two club lengths where he has to drop it.

Ground Under Repair. I am sure no Superintendent likes to have areas of his golf course considered to be “ground under repair.” But I am equally sure that you all have them, from time to time. Through the green, the player whose ball comes to rest in ground under repair may lift and drop it within two club lengths, or he may play it where it lies. But if the boundaries of the ground under repair are not clearly defined and the ball comes to rest in a bad lie near the boundary, then the question becomes, “Is the ball really in ground under repair?” If it is, the player may drop it out without penalty; if it is not, he either plays the bad lie or calls it an unplayable lie and takes a penalty stroke. So, except for cases where the boundary is obvious, like an open construction ditch or a pile of dirt, the boundaries should be clearly marked. Fortunately, some new equipment has recently appeared on the market to facilitate the marking of such boundaries at a reasonable cost; use of it is recommended.

Hazards. Bunkers and water hazards are clearly defined in the Rules and since the Rules governing play of the ball, or the relief that may be afforded, are different when it is in the hazard from when it is not, it becomes important that the boundaries of the hazards also be clearly marked.

The Committee. The Rules say that "The Committee shall define accurately . . ." all these boundaries, and so forth, but let's not kid ourselves — it's the Superintendent who has to get it done. If his Club Committee don't seek him out to get such things done, then he should seek them out and, by cooperative effort and understanding, make the conditions he creates the best that circumstances permit.

Discussions of this character could be continued ad infinitum, but I will conclude before my Superintendent friends get the idea that I am totally "again 'em" — when just the opposite is true. Having played golf for fifty-two years, and on many courses — all the way from the oiled sand or cottonseed greens, and clay tees for agronomy we call golf courses today — I have nothing but the highest admiration for you gentlemen and the progress you have made, and especially for the degree of professionalism that has come to your ranks. And I hope that this little article will contribute to your further progress by creating more awareness of the relation of the Rules of Golf to your fine efforts.

Credit to *The Foreground*, Metropolitan Golf Course Superintendents Association, New York.

Newsletter Announcement

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This newsletter contains a stamped and addressed postcard that you must fill out promptly and return to Sam Kessel. Sam can't complete this new directory until all cards are returned. Please include all information requested even if you have not moved or changed your address. All cards should be returned before our April 10th meeting in Fredericksburg. Sam should then be able to complete the new directory information at the meeting, hopefully. DO NOT DELAY — the sooner we can compile the new directory the sooner you will receive your updated copy.

GCSAA CONFERENCES

1974 — Feb. 17-22, Anaheim Convention Center
Anaheim, California

1975 — Feb. 16-21, New Orleans, Louisiana
Headquarters, The Rivergate

Aug. and Dec. Meetings

Contact: Paul Barefoot
U.S. Soldiers Home
726-9100, Ext. 239

South of the Equator all climbing vines twine from right to left.

North of the Equator they twine from left to right.

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