



Playability from tall rough areas is highly variable.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM TALL ROUGH AREAS AND WHEN

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When watching televised golf, it is common to hear discussions about “fescue areas.” We all know what they are talking about – the areas of tall rough that haven’t been mowed for a while. The professionals try to avoid it but, even when they can’t, they are typically able to find and advance their ball from the tall rough. So why do the rest of us amateur golfers find ourselves searching for lost balls and struggling to advance the ball from these areas? There are a few reasons why the conditions in tall rough areas vary from course to course and even throughout the season.

First and foremost, many tall roughs contain grasses and plants other than fine fescue. This species is often the most desirable for tall rough areas because it has an attractive brown appearance and is thin enough to find golf balls and hit recovery shots. However, there are a few reasons why most facilities don’t have a pure stand of fine fescue:

- **Location:** Fine fescue is not well-suited to hot and wet climates. It is difficult for many courses to maintain a pure stand of fine fescue simply because of their local climate or soil conditions.
- **Establishment:** Creating a pure stand of fine fescue usually requires starting with a clean slate. All existing plant material is removed or killed before hydroseeding or sodding the area with pure fine fescue. This process can be expensive and time-consuming.
- **Maintenance:** Eliminating and preventing other grasses and weeds from invading pure stands of fine fescue often requires resource-intensive maintenance, especially if local conditions are not suitable to fine fescue.

Tall rough areas with grasses other than fine fescue can create the same strategic interest and are acceptable, but they will probably be thicker than some of the fine fescue areas you see on TV. As tall rough areas get thicker it will become more difficult to find golf balls and hit recovery shots.

Most golf courses try to minimize the amount of time and money spent maintaining rough areas. After all, a well-struck golf shot should be hit from one primary playing surface to another. By minimizing maintenance in tall rough areas, facilities can better focus their resources on more important playing surfaces. Just remember, the playing conditions and aesthetics of tall rough areas are affected by a variety of factors including:

- **Plant species:** Although fine fescue is often the desired species for tall rough areas, its natural for many tall rough areas to also contain other grasses and plants. Different grasses and plants play and look differently – some grow more vertically while others are thick and tend to grow horizontally.
- **Maintenance intensity:** One of the greatest benefits of tall rough areas is that they require minimal maintenance if expectations are kept reasonable. However, maintaining a pure stand of fine fescue can be very costly and time-consuming.
- **Weather and seasonal variability:** The playability of tall rough areas will fluctuate with weather trends. When the weather is favorable for growth – e.g., periods with frequent rain – tall rough areas can become more penal.
- **Location:** Their aesthetic appeal can make tall rough areas a prominent feature on golf courses but if located too close to high-play areas they can create pace-of-play issues.
- **Traffic:** When golf carts or heavy foot traffic enter tall rough areas the grass will lay flat, making it much more difficult to find golf balls and hit recovery shots. Minimizing traffic in tall rough areas will improve playability.

As with all the other areas of a golf course, there is an inherent level of variability regarding the playability of tall rough areas. The above factors can help you gauge just how penal these areas might be but remember one thing – no tall rough area is designed or intended to be more enjoyable to play from than the middle of the fairway.