

Greenkeepers ought to know all about obstructions on their courses. This article describes what can happen and sums up the rules.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT OBSTRUCTIONS

By JOSEPH C. DEY, JR.

IT was a sad story the new golfer was telling:

"My drive was right down the middle," he said; "one of the few I hit in the fairway all day. But I found the ball nestling against a water outlet.

"Well, I tried to hit it with my No. 3 iron. Not only was it a punk shot, but I broke my club, and it was a new one."

"But why didn't you lift the ball?" his friend asked.

"Lift it? I thought you had to play the ball as it lies all the time."

That's a good, safe way to start life as a golfer—to play the ball as it lies. But there are times when the ball may be lifted and its position improved without penalty.

The average golfer is inclined to regard the Rules of Golf as being mainly prohibitions and obligations—you can't do this and you must do that. That dim view is an uninformed view.

The Rules contain a great many rights and privileges which can be appreciated only by reading the code. An important Rule in this respect is the one which the new golfer in the sad incident above could have invoked but did not—Rule 31, dealing with obstructions. This Rule is a prolific source of questions submitted to the U.S.G.A.

Artificial or Natural?

It should first be understood what is meant by the term "obstruction". *Artificial* things in general are obstructions (a can or a hydrant, for example). *Natural* things are not obstructions. Definition 20 in the Rules provides:

"An 'obstruction' is anything artificial, whether erected, placed or left on the course, except:

"(a) Objects defining out of bounds, such as walls, fences, stakes and railings;

"(b) Artificial surfaces and sides of roads and paths;

"(c) In water hazards, artificially surfaced banks or beds, including

bridge supports when part of such a bank. Bridges and bridge supports which are not part of such a bank are obstructions.

"(d) Any construction declared by the Committee to be part of the course."

Thus obstructions include such things as:

pipes	water outlets	buildings
vehicles	bottles	shelters
paper	rakes	hoses

To contrast such artificial things with natural objects (which are not obstructions), Definition 17 describes loose impediments as follows:

"The term 'loose impediments' denotes natural objects not fixed or growing and not adhering to the ball, and includes stones not solidly embedded, leaves, twigs, branches and the like, dung, worms and insects and casts or heaps made by them."

In summary: An obstruction is *artificial*. A loose impediment is *natural*.

How to Treat an Obstruction

Relief from an obstruction is provided for in Rule 31.

The first section presents no problems:

"Any movable obstruction may be removed. If the ball be moved in so doing, it shall be replaced on the exact spot from which it was moved, without penalty. If it be impossible to determine the spot or to replace the ball on the exact spot from which it was moved, the ball shall, through the green or in a hazard, be dropped, or on the putting green be placed, as near as possible to the spot from which it was moved but not nearer the hole, without penalty.

"When a ball is in motion, an obstruction other than an attended flagstick and equipment of the players shall not be removed."

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Suppose a rake has been left in a bunker. Your ball comes to rest against the rake. As the rake is movable, you may remove it. If your ball is moved in the process, you must place or drop it as specified.

The second section of Rule 31 deals with *immovable* obstructions:

“When the ball lies on or touches an immovable obstruction, or when an immovable obstruction within two club-lengths of the ball interferes with the player’s stance, stroke or backward movement of his club for the stroke in the direction in which he wishes to play, the ball may be lifted without penalty. Through the green or in a hazard, the ball shall be dropped, or on the putting green placed, within two club-lengths of that point on the outside of the obstruction nearest which the ball originally lay; it must not come to rest in, on or touching the obstruction or nearer the hole than its original position.

“The player may not measure over, through or under the obstruction.

“Interference with the line of play is not of itself interference under this Rule.

“(Ball in hazard—Rule 22-2b.)”

When the Rule Applies

In the first place, we may apply Rule 31-2 if the ball *lies on or touches* an *immovable* obstruction.

Secondly, we may also apply the Rule when *all three* of the following conditions exist:

1. There must be interference with the player’s stance or stroke or the backward movement of his club for the stroke.

2. The interference must come from an obstruction which is immovable.

3. The obstruction must be within two club-lengths of the ball.

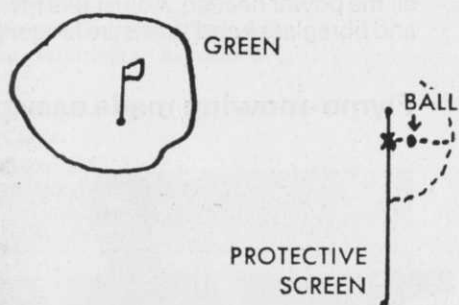
If any one of these three conditions is not present, you can’t invoke this section of the Rule.

But assuming all three conditions do exist, what relief does the Rule allow? Well, you may lift the ball, without penalty. Then, everywhere except on the putting green, you *drop* it within two club-lengths of *that point on the outside*

of the obstruction nearest which the ball originally lay, and it must come to rest not nearer the hole. On the putting green you *place* it as described above.

Note that you don’t drop it within two club-lengths of where the *ball* originally lay. Suppose the ball originally lay a club-length from a protective screen which interfered with your back-swing. If you were allowed to drop it within two club-lengths of where it originally lay, you might drop it a total of three club-length from the screen.

To make matters uniform and fair, the Rule requires dropping the ball within two club-lengths of *that point on the outside of the screen nearest which the ball originally lay*. Here is an example:



Point X is that point of the screen nearest which the ball originally lay. You are allowed to drop within two club-lengths of that point, not nearer the hole than where the ball first lay. Thus, if the straight dotted line is two club-lengths long, you may drop the ball anywhere within the territory bounded by the curved dotted line, provided the ball comes to rest not nearer the hole than its original position. You may *not* measure *over, through* or *under* the obstruction in determining where to drop within two club-lengths.

Out-of-Bounds Stakes Not Obstructions

Under Definition 20, stakes or similar objects used to mark out of bounds are *not* obstructions. Therefore, they may not be pulled up. If they interfere with a stroke or stance, there is no free relief from them.

Various means are used to define
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HON. SECRETARY'S NOTES

I HAVE RECEIVED A LETTER from a young man in Pakistan, who is most anxious to obtain a job in this country as a greenkeeper. His name and address is Chowdhry Abdur Hazzaq, House No. 484, Sector No. G6/1-2, Islamabad, West Pakistan.

He is a Science graduate from the University of the Punjab, and for the last three years has been working as Horticultural Assistant in the Capital Development Authority in Islamabad.

He is 28 years of age, and holds an international passport.

If any member should know of an opportunity for this young man, who has been highly recommended by Mr J. F. Pennick (Golf Architect), I should be glad if they would arrange for any inquiry to be made direct to Pakistan.

C. H. DIX.

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boundaries: stakes, fence posts and so forth. Sometimes, on a single hole, part of a boundary is marked by a fence and part by stakes. It is advisable to treat them uniformly. Since the nearest inside points of stakes and fence posts at ground level determine the line of bounds (Definition 21), the stakes and posts themselves are out of bounds. Rule 31 applies only to obstructions *on the course*.

Further, if out-of-bounds stakes were classified as obstructions, a player might remove some to play a stroke, and the player might neglect to have them replaced. Thus, the competitors in a tournament might not play a uniform course.

Classifying out-of-bounds stakes as non-obstructions discourages tampering with them, simplifies the definition with regard to boundary markers and helps ensure uniform playing conditions.

(However, stakes defining water hazards are obstructions under the Rules.)

Incidentally, some clubs set out-of-bounds stakes permanently in concrete, or use concrete markers. This prevents a fluctuating boundary and in the long run should reduce upkeep costs.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Sutton Coldfield.

Dear Mr Editor,

I was very interested in the letter in the February Journal from Paddy Coleman. I had the pleasure of meeting him at one of our tournaments two years ago. From the correspondence I had with him previously I got the view that he was keen to become a greenkeeper, so I took him several back-dated Research Journals, for which he was very grateful, and I am sure he would make good use of the information they contained. None of the other members of the staff on the course were members of our Association, and the impression he gave me from the questions he asked, he did not receive any information, or help from them. I congratulated him on his perseverance and determination to succeed. As he said the Midland Section does not have many lectures. When I became secretary I was keen to have lectures, and fixed quite a number but the response was very poor, and the attendances got worse. The climax came when one lecturer returned to his hotel without giving the lecture. You can imagine the letter I received from that gentleman. At our last committee meeting our new secretary, Bob Goodwin, was very keen to fix up some lectures for next winter, so it is up to the section members to let him know that they will give him their support and will attend. On lots of occasions when I was secretary I had letters from clubs to say they were keen on their staff belonging to our Association and I have replied telling them what benefits their staffs would receive—our monthly journal, the quarterly S.T.R.I. bulletins, the yearly S.T.R.I. journal and a chance to meet and talk over their problems with other greenkeepers at our tournaments and other events. I am sorry to say that on most occasions I did not hear any more about it, although I enclosed nomination forms for them to give to their staff. I must say I think golf clubs get the staff they deserve.

Yours sincerely,

F. CASHMORE.