

The Greenkeeper and the Rules of Golf

Tim Hudspith, of the PGA's Tournament Department outlines some of the rules with which greenkeepers should be well acquainted

For a greenkeeper to set up a golf course that is well defined for not only the player but also the Committee administering an event, an awareness and understanding of a number of Rules of Golf issues is of prime importance.

The rules of the game revolve around honesty and integrity and every greenkeeper must endeavour to provide all golfers who step on to their course with an opportunity of applying them fairly and consistently.

This article will attempt to identify a number of on-course rules issues that are frequently misunderstood and applied incorrectly by many greenkeepers up and down the country.



▲ The golfer is entitled to stand outside the markers - always assess the ground around each marker



▲ The teeing ground is two club lengths in depth - always assess the ground within that area

THE TEEING GROUND

The game of golf begins at the teeing ground and this is one area of the course where many misjudgements are made. The Rules of Golf defines it as 'a rectangular area two-club lengths in depth', therefore when setting the tee markers, greens staff should always ensure that they are positioned **at least** two club-lengths forward from the back edge of the tee.

Additionally, the area surrounding the teeing ground must also be considered. A golfer should be able to make an unobstructed swing even if he tees his ball at the extremity of the two club-length area. Therefore, any trees, artificial obstructions (e.g. tee boards) or advertising banners that may obstruct the golfer when taking his stance or swing should be identified and the markers adjusted if necessary. Much emphasis is placed upon setting up the course at its full length, but accurate rules interpretation should not be compromised for this to be achieved.

Regarding the width of a teeing ground, it is suggested that the markers are placed approximately six paces apart. By doing so, turf is protected and it can also be argued that if any wider, the player may inadvertently breach the rules by teeing his ball in front of the markers, due to difficulties in assessing alignment.

Because Rule 11-1 states that 'a player may stand outside the teeing ground to play a ball within it', it is also recommended that the markers are thus set that if a player wishes to take advantage of this option, his stance will be on the same level as the ball. A golfer may wish make full use of the teeing ground in order to gain a particular view of the hole – he will not be impressed if by doing so he will be standing on a bank one foot above his ball!

Although not strictly a rules of golf issue, the direction of the tees must also be considered. It sounds obvious but a golfer will be much better prepared to play a hole if the tee is pointing straight down the fairway rather than towards the trees or worse still, out of bounds – not an uncommon sight!

Effectively, the line between the two markers should be at a right angle to the drive zone or putting green if the hole is a par 3. The simplest way to establish this is for a greenkeeper to stand on the tee, extend his arms at a 90 degree angle to the intended target on the hole (e.g. drive zone) and place the markers in line with his arms.



▲ When setting tees, ensure the markers are pointing in the right direction!



▲ When defining out of bounds, stakes should be clearly visible and continuous

teeing

ground

Finally, lefties should not be forgotten! There is no doubt that they are in the minority, but it is important to ensure that on the teeing ground a left handed golfer is afforded the same room to manoeuvre as a right handed player.

WATER HAZARDS & OUT OF BOUNDS – HOW SHOULD THEY BE MARKED?

All golfers from time to time encounter water hazards and out of bounds (OB) and because penalties are involved, clear and accurate definition of both are vital.

With regards water hazards, if stakes (and in some cases, lines) are installed, the Rules of Golf advise that they should be 'placed as nearly as possible along the natural limits of the hazard', i.e. where the ground breaks to form the depression containing the water - not on the water line itself. All too often, stakes are installed at the bottom of banks, as close as possible to the water. However, if the course is subjected to heavy rain and the hazard overflows, the player would be entitled to a free drop if his ball has come to rest in such overflow – advantageous for the player, but not what the rules of golf intend!

When marking water hazards, it is also important to visualise where a player would be dropping his ball after hitting his ball into water. For example, with a lateral (red) water hazard, a player is entitled to take relief within two club-lengths of the point where the ball last crossed the margin.

As the player is already subjected to a one shot penalty, it would be unfair to penalise him further by expecting him to take his drop on a sloping bank, with a difficult shot ensuing. Therefore, stakes and lines defining lateral hazards should be marked on as flat a ground as possible.

With regard to OB stakes, they should be clearly identifiable from post to post - ideally placed approximately 15 paces apart and avoiding intervening bushes and trees etc. They should also follow the natural boundary of the course – ideally following as straight a line as possible.

If the stakes and/or lines 'wobble' or 'zig-zag' their way up a hole, the Committee (and then the greens staff!) are likely to be leaving themselves open for an ear bashing from disgruntled players! For example, a golfer whose ball has unfortunately crossed such a line will naturally be upset if he has to return to the tee, whilst his playing partner who is further from the fairway, but in bounds due to poor marking, avoids penalty.

When marking water hazards and OB, it is vital that all stakes and lines must have a logical 'beginning' and 'end'. All too often, they do not 'tie up', whether it be with one another or a boundary wall etc. In this situation, the golfer may not be sure whether his ball is in/out of a water hazard or out of bounds etc, and may therefore adopt the incorrect rules procedure and be subject to possible penalty.

It should never be assumed that a certain area is 'out of play' – golfers of all standards take on risks when playing, golf balls end up in strange locations, and a player will invariably argue that even though his ball is lying in Mrs Jones' back garden, due to the fact that there are no white stakes nearby, then he must be in bounds! This scenario represents a highly uncomfortable situation for a greenkeeper (and rules official!) to find himself in. Therefore, the whole playing area MUST be clearly and continuously defined.

A current trend amongst greens staff is for water hazard and OB stakes to be cemented into the ground. This obviously reduces wanton course vandalism and theft, but from a rules perspective it can cause confusion for the player.

The rules state that stakes defining water hazards are obstructions and ideally, they should be movable. If not, the player (a) would not be able to move the stake if interference exists, and (b) if the ball is lying in the water hazard, he would not be entitled to free relief. In addition, with OB stakes, although the rule states that a player is not entitled to move them in order to play a stroke, if the Committee wishes to redefine areas and therefore relocate them, the course would be subjected to damage by doing so.

WATER HAZARDS – YELLOW OR RED?

The difference between a yellow water hazard and a red (lateral) water hazard is also worth highlighting – the colour a hazard is marked will influence the players dropping options if his ball ends up in the water.

Quite simply, a water hazard is marked yellow if it is practical for a player to drop a ball behind the water, keeping the point where the ball last crossed the margin between himself and the hole. However, instances will arise, where it is not practical or even possible for a player to physically drop a ball behind. For example, a hedge or a building may border the hazard, or alternatively, the immediate dropping area comprises of thick woodland or even out of bounds!

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In these instances, the hazards should be marked with red stakes or lines, thus enabling the golfer to drop the ball **laterally** within two club-lengths of the point where it last crossed, or if possible, on the opposite margin equidistant to the hole.

GROUND UNDER REPAIR

Finally, the subject of ground under repair (GUR) causes much discussion in clubhouse bars – usually sparked off by a disgruntled golfer who had the misfortune of experiencing a particularly nasty lie in the rough!

However, it is worth noting that many areas of the course that are classed as GUR under the Rules of Golf need not be marked. It is a common sight when arriving at a tournament, for the course to look more like a murder scene than a golf links due to a paint gun happy/GUR obsessed Greens Chairman!

For example, casts, holes or runways made by burrowing animals



or birds do not require white lines, nor does casual water, material piled for removal or **ANY** hole made by a greenkeeper. By remembering this, the greenkeeper will promote consistency in his marking of GUR. Additionally, the aesthetics of the course are not compromised, whilst the club will save themselves a fortune on paint!

In conclusion, under Rule 6-1, 'the player is responsible for knowing the Rules'. However, if a greenkeeper pays special attention to the above pointers, his course will be presented to a highly professional standard and will fall into line with recommendations outlined in the Rules of Golf.

Additionally, it will aid the competitor in applying the rules both fairly and consistently – and may well even help to improve relationships with any 'difficult' Greens Committee or rules 'boffins' at the club!

All photographs taken at the DeVere Belfry.



▲ 3 photographs above: The Committee should be sure whether the water hazard is to be marked red or yellow