



# The Greenkeeper and The Rules of Golf

**PGA**

Edward Johnson, **Tournament Controller for the PGA**, highlights some of the key points to consider for all greenkeepers and identifies a number of on-course rules of golf issues that are often misunderstood and applied incorrectly by many Greenkeepers up and down the country

**A greenkeeper has many roles at their own golf club. However, using the Rules of Golf to understand and implement the correct procedures for marking a golf course is not always something high on their agenda.**

## THE TEEING GROUND

The game of golf begins at the teeing ground. 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. The width of the tee markers is also important to consider. It is recommended that greens staff use a minimum of six paces to allow enough room for a field of golfers to tee off from, with this being especially important on Par 3's to protect the turf on the teeing ground. Also, As 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.

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. As a reference, it is recommended that a paint spot is put down next to both tee markers in case these were moved during the course of a tournament round. This then gives players a fair chance to play from the correct position at all times and also so a greenkeeper or Official can replace the tee marker in its original position. Much emphasis is placed upon setting up the course at its full length, but accurate rules interpre-





tation should not be compromised for this to be achieved.

Although not strictly a rules of golf issue, the direction of the tees must also be considered. Although sounding obvious, a golfer will be much better prepared to play a hole if the tee is pointing straight down the fairway instead of Out of Bounds for example. The use of a "T Bar" is extremely useful for this which is simply two pieces of plastic tubing stick together in the shape of a 'T'. If the two ends of the horizontal part of the 'T' line up with the two tee markers, then the vertical part of the 'T' will always point down the middle of the Fairway and thus provide the green keeper with a perfectly square teeing ground.

Finally, left handers should never 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. This sounds daft but it is amazing how many times this can be forgotten.

sion 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 under the 'casual water' rule. This would be far too advantageous for the player and not what the rules of golf intend!

If lines are installed, it is recommended that they are painted slightly on the inside of a stake. This means that the stake is out of the hazard and thus if the ball rolls against a stake which is then taken out of the ground by a player and creates a hole (an abnormal ground condition), the player would get free relief under rule 25-1.

If however the hole created by the removed stake was inside the water hazard, the player would be denied relief and would have to play the ball as it lies (in the hole) or take relief under the water hazard rule (Rule 26-1).



Tee markers too close to the back of the tee

### Water Hazards & Out Of Bounds: How Should They Really Be Marked?

Unfortunately in golf, all golfers from time to time encounter water hazards and out of bounds (OB). When penalties are involved from a golf Club Championship to a big professional golf tournament with massive prize money, clear and accurate definition of both these areas are absolutely vital.

With regards to 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 depres-

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. Also, should you have your stakes and lines on a slope, it will increase the chance of a ball when being dropped under the water hazard rule (Rule 26-1) to bounce or roll back into the hazard thus creating a re-drop situation.





Should the ball be unable to be replaced on this spot following the re-drop, it is more than likely that the player will end up placing on a flat part of the course as this will be the nearest point where the player's ball will stay at rest. 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 were to wobble 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. Stakes and lines must also be tied in either to a wall or a fence to ensure that a player is never in doubt whether their ball is in a water hazard or Out of Bounds. Also, if lines are used, they must be painted clearly and of at least 3 inches in width to ensure that it is a clear whether a ball is in or out of the water hazard or Out of Bounds. Although somewhat time consuming, a double layer of paint is also recommended and the results will certainly be worthwhile!

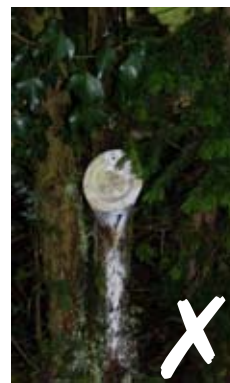
A current trend among green staff is for water hazard and OB stakes to be cemented into the ground. This obviously reduces course vandalism and theft, but from a rules perspective it can cause confusion for the player and create erroneous rulings. The rules state that stakes defining water hazards are obstructions and ideally, they should always 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 as the stake would now become an immovable obstruction. 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: So Is It Yellow Or Red?**

It is amazing how many people get confused in the difference between a yellow water hazard and a red (lateral) water hazard. The colour chosen is not a decision to be taken lightly. How the hazard is marked will influence the players dropping options if his ball ends up in the water.

In simple terms, 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. 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. If greenkeepers think about this when marking water hazards, they should always end up with a correctly marked hazard which will dramatically reduce the risk of a tricky ruling situation!

### The Putting Green – Pin Positions

When setting a golf course up, pin positions on the green are one of the hottest debated topics at a tournament or a monthly medal at a golf club. Greenkeepers should be aware that when setting a pin position, there is no law as to how far on a green the pin should be or how far from the side of the green the pin should be. However, as a rule of thumb, it is recommended that a pin position should never be less than four paces on the green from the front edge and less than three paces from the side; ie. a three on, two right pin would not be recommended as this would not only look strange on the eye but would also be deemed as being unfair to the competitor.

When setting pins, another area to consider is whether the area where the pin is to be put is close to a bunker and may be affected by the sand which lands on the putting green. Although in the Rules of Golf, sand and loose soil are only loose impediments on the putting green and thus, may only be moved on the putting green, it would look visually poor for visitors or members of the golf club to have a pin position covered with sand. If these guidelines are followed, then there should be less cause for debate in the clubhouse after play!

### Ground Under Repair (Gur)

Finally, the subject of ground under repair (GUR) tends to cause much discussion in clubhouse bars. Normally the debate is what defines an area of a golf course to be GUR and is usually sparked off by an angry golfer who had the misfortune of experiencing a particularly nasty lie in the rough!

An area of GUR should only be marked by a greenkeeper if they are certain that this area is abnormal from anywhere else on the golf course. If during a tournament, relief is given for GUR, this area must be marked by a white line immediately so that any further



balls within this area are given the same ruling as given previously. Consistency is the key in terms of the rules of golf.

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 often common for golf courses to be covered in white paint under the instruction of the Committee of simply just a paint happy greenkeeper... there is no need for this!

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 and visually, the golf course will look a lot better to visitors.

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.

When playing tournament golf, a correctly marked golf course will also aid the competitor in applying the rules both fairly and consistently which at the end of the day is the desired effect for both a Committee and the player.

