

Defining the boundaries



Boundary lining



WORKING FOR GOLF

Quite understandably, greenkeepers tend to be entirely focussed on the condition of their courses and, with time always being of the essence, keeping the course accurately “marked” from a Rules of Golf perspective can be difficult. However, ensuring that the course is defined should not be considered an optional extra but rather as an essential part of maintaining the course. Grant Moir, Director of Rules, at The R&A, writes...

When a course is not defined accurately it can lead to confusion on the part of players, and this can lead to breaches of the Rules, such as:

- **Playing the ball from an out of bounds area**
- **Moving loose impediments in a water hazard, or**
- **Taking relief from an area that has ceased to have the status of ground under repair.**

When a course has clearly marked boundaries, water hazards and ground under repair it shows a high level of professionalism, and reflects well on the greenstaff and the Club.

Boundaries

If it is a while since you turned your attention to the Rules of Golf in relation to your course, then the first place to start is with the boundaries. Ideally, the entire perimeter of the course should have an accurate boundary.

If you are fortunate, much of the course boundary will be defined by fences or walls, but most courses have some areas of the boundary that need to be supplemented by white stakes to “join” the permanent features and create the complete boundary.

The difficulty with using stakes is that they can be moved. Greenkeepers with courses by the beach will know that wooden stakes are

often used for sizzling sausages on a Saturday night, so it is important to keep a check that the stakes are still in place.

As the Rules provide that boundary stakes are deemed to be fixed, there is no disadvantage to the player if boundary stakes are made permanent.

This can be done by using metal poles sunk into concrete, which are given a lick of paint every so often. This can solve the problem of stakes being removed.

Of course, it is not only the perimeter of a course that can be defined as out of bounds. Many courses have internal boundaries, for example, around maintenance areas or between two holes to prevent players playing down the ‘wrong’ fairway. Internal out of bounds is entirely acceptable, but again it is important to ensure that these boundaries are well defined at all times.

Water Hazards

Perhaps the most common failing when it comes to course marking is in relation to water hazards. Some water hazards have very clearly defined edges, so there is no doubting whether a ball lies in or outside the hazard.

However, many rivers, burns, ponds, ditches and the like do not have distinct margins, and in such cases it is necessary to define the margins using stakes or painted lines.



Such definition enables the player to know whether a ball is in or out of the hazard. This is important for the following reasons:

- If the player wants to play the ball as it lies, he knows whether the restrictions that apply to a ball in a hazard apply (e.g. not grounding the club, not moving loose impediments), and

- If the ball is in the hazard, the player knows that the relief options provided under the Rules for water hazards are available.

In addition, as the point where the ball last crossed the margin of the hazard is often the relevant reference point for taking relief, the fact that the margin is clearly defined will enable the player to proceed correctly under the Rule.

It can be costly and time consuming to define water hazard margins with painted lines, so the use of stakes tends to be the method of choice for daily play.

When positioning stakes, it is important to bear in mind that the margin will be a straight line from stake to stake, so you need to ensure that this provides an appropriate margin for the hazard that is being marked out.

Another important element to defining water hazards is the distinction between ordinary water hazards (defined by yellow stakes or lines) and lateral water hazards (defined by red stakes or lines).

The simple explanation of the distinction between the two types of hazard is that, where it is impossible or not practical for a player to drop back on a direct line to the

sultation with the Club Committee, County Union or National Union may be appropriate.

Ground Under Repair

We always advise referees to review the entire course before marking any ground under repair (GUR). It is easy to get trigger happy with the paint on the 1st hole and then find that the type of area that you have marked as GUR on the 1st is prevalent on many holes and is far from abnormal to that particular course. The advice, therefore, is not to overdo it with GUR. Golf courses are not perfect, despite the best efforts of greenkeepers. Players should have to deal with bad lies, bare ground and the like, and coping with such challenges is a test of a player's skill and mental fortitude.

Also, the farther a damaged area is from the line that the player should be on, the less compelled you should feel to make it as GUR. In other words, while you might want to define a muddy area on the fairway as GUR, it is entirely reasonable to expect the player to play from such an area when it is situated 10 yards off the fairway in the rough.

When areas are to be defined as GUR, they need to be clearly marked. Simply putting a notice in the ground does not help the player. The player needs to know the extent of the area that is GUR so that relief can be taken correctly, so again stakes or lines need to be used for definition. There is no strict colour

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hole when taking relief, the hazard should be defined at a lateral water hazard, which then allows a player additional relief options. Take, for example, the beach running along holes 4 to 8 at Turnberry - going back on a direct line to the hole would probably mean dropping a ball on Ireland, so the beach on these holes is defined as a lateral water hazard. This allows for a drop two club-lengths to the side of where the ball last crossed the margin of the hazard.

There can be occasions where the decision on whether to define a water hazard as yellow or red is a tricky one, and that is when con-

sultation with the Club Committee, County Union or National Union may be appropriate.

for marking GUR; white is common but can be confused with boundaries so blue is quite a popular alternative. The Local Rules should make it clear how GUR is defined. Unlike, boundaries and water hazards, the hope with GUR is that it will only have to be defined as such for a limited period of time. When an area ceases to be GUR it is important that this is obvious. Don't leave a faded line that players could think is still defining the GUR. If necessary, apply some green paint to make it clear that the area is no longer GUR or put a very visible sign at the area stating that it is no longer GUR.



The Rules give the player the option of playing from GUR, but the Committee also has the option, by Local Rule, of prohibiting play from areas of GUR. It is fine to prohibit play, and often sensible when attempts are being made to allow an area to recover.

However, if a player is being forced to take a drop, it is important to assess where the Rules require relief to be taken. If the nearest point of relief is in the middle of a bush, you might receive legitimate complaints. It may be that a dropping zone is required in such circumstances.

To Finish...

Course marking is not a huge task if you keep on top of it. Sometimes it is best approached by allocating the responsibility to a specific member of your staff, perhaps one with a good golfing background who understands the relevance of the various stakes and lines.

And, if your Club has any doubts about course marking issues, there is always help at hand from the county and national bodies, or from The R&A.