

The Most Misunderstood and Violated Rules of Golf: A Player's Guide

According to Rule 1-1: "The Game of Golf consists in playing a ball from the teeing ground into the hole by a stroke or successive strokes in accordance with the Rules." Sounds easy, right? Unfortunately for many of us playing it, the game of golf can actually be rather complicated. Even more complex for most golfers is the last part of the previous statement, "in accordance with the Rules."

Playing by the Rules presents a challenge for most golfers. Some players choose to play the ball into the hole without any concern for the Rules, while others are simply unaware of the Rules altogether. In order for the average player to better adhere to the Rules of Golf, it is first essential to explore which Rules are most often violated or ignored by players.

One of the most violated or ignored Rules in golf is **Rule 4-4: Maximum of 14 Clubs**. Not too long ago, there was no limit to the number of clubs that a golfer could carry in his bag. No limit existed primarily because there was no reason to impose one. A player could not load up his bag even if he had sought to simply because not enough different styles of clubs were available to



him. However, this changed when specialty clubs like the sand wedge came on the scene. Eventually, players, including star professionals, were carrying 20 to 30 clubs in their bags. In order to halt these excesses, in 1938 the USGA established a maximum number of clubs to be carried. Fourteen clubs were considered a full set, so that became the official USGA limit.

For most golfers, mastering the Rules of Golf can be just as complex as succeeding at playing the game itself.

If the 1930s saw a problem with an excessive amount of specialty clubs becoming available, the same issue certainly exists today. Several club manufacturers are promoting clubs that fill a gap in a player's game. Many golfers refuse to "sacrifice" a club. So rather than replace it, they simply add the new club to the bag. It is easy to go from 14 clubs to 16 or 17 if a player is constantly trying to get an edge on the competition. Because of this, Rule 4-4 is often knowingly violated when a player feels that the game is difficult enough without also having to restrict the number of clubs that are allowed in the bag.

Rule 13: Ball Played as it Lies is another of golf's most violated Rules. Even on perfectly manicured fairways, some players are compelled to improve the lie of the ball, as demonstrated in the photo of the player pressing down the

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grass behind his ball. Another example of a blatant violation of Rule 13 is when the player presses down behind the ball with the club head or rolls the ball into a more favorable position with the club head. Rule 13 is certainly a basic principle of golf, however, it is deliberately violated most often because of the overwhelming temptation to make the next stroke easier to execute.

Rule 4-4 and Rule 13 are two examples of Rules that are often intentionally overlooked. Many of the other common violations occur when a person is not familiar with a specific Rule or procedure. Take Rule 18, for example. What is the procedure if your ball is at rest and is subsequently moved? If the ball moves because of something other than wind, water or gravity, the ball must be re-placed. Most players are unaware that they must do this and they play it from its new position. One of the most heralded situations involving Rule 18 occurred when Davis Love III accidentally moved his ball with a practice stroke and failed to re-place it. He was eventually disqualified because he failed to apply the general two-stroke penalty for playing from a wrong place.

Other commonly misguided Rules situations that result in golfers

playing from a wrong place relate to **Rules 24 through 28**. Referred to as the "Five Golden Rules" because of the frequency of their application, Rules 24-28 cover relief situations and procedures.

Rule 24: The term "obstructions" is most often violated because a player believes he is entitled to relief when in fact he is not. An example of this would be a player taking relief from a fence defining "out of bounds." Objects defining out of bounds are not considered obstructions, therefore no relief is available

without penalty. Many players are unaware of this and take relief from an out-of-bounds fence or stake as if it were a cart path or ballwasher. In reality, they should have proceeded under the Unplayable Ball Rule and applied a one-stroke penalty.

The other common violation occurs when a player believes he is entitled to relief because an obstruction intrudes on his line of play. Pump houses and halfway houses are notorious obstacles for intervening on the line of play. A player may believe that because the obstruction is in the way of a shot, interference exists. However, there is no "line of sight" relief referenced in Rule 24.

As "line of sight" is a habitually misrepresented phrase with respect to Rule 24, "line of flight" is more frequently misused when referring to the water hazard relief options under Rule 26. There are two types of hazards in reference to Rule 26: water hazards, marked with yellow stakes and lines, and lateral water hazards, marked with red stakes and lines. In the case of water hazards (yellow), a player has three (3) options (see 1-3 below). Lateral water hazards (red) have two additional options (4 and 5 below). The mistake that players so frequently make in taking relief from a water hazard is dropping a ball on the path that the original ball took

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Lateral Water Hazard

5 options - Same 3 plus 2

1. Play the ball as it lies--no penalty.
- OR, Under penalty of one stroke:
2. Play a ball under the *stroke and distance* procedure.
3. Drop behind the *hazard* keeping the point between the *hole* and the spot on which the ball is dropped.
4. Drop 2 club-lengths from the point of entry into the *hazard*.
5. Drop 2 club-lengths from point on the *opposite margin, equidistant* from the hole.

before it ended up in the hazard (the "line of flight"). Unfortunately, playing a ball that is dropped along the "line of flight" would, in most cases, result in a penalty for playing from a wrong place. If the offense for playing from a wrong place is serious enough, it could result in the disqualification of the player.

A serious breach of the Rules often occurs when a player loses the ball or hits the ball out of bounds. Rather than taking the stroke and distance penalty as prescribed in **Rule 27: Ball Lost or Out of Bounds**, a golfer drops a ball where the original ball might be lost or out of bounds. Whether this mistake is based on ignorance or is done to save time, it will result in a penalty of disqualification unless the breach is corrected. The penalty of stroke and distance has been regarded as one of the more severe penalties in golf. However, currently no other equitable alternative for a ball that is lost or out of bounds exists.

As for **Rule 28: Ball Unplayable**, how many times has a player measured two club lengths from the edge, or side, of a bush rather than where the unplayable ball lies in the bush? Unfortunately, this is another wrong-place issue that could require a penalty.

For most golfers, mastering the Rules of Golf can be just as complex as succeeding at playing the game itself. Therefore, playing by the Rules can offer a great challenge. Sometimes, this challenge of the game leads players to choose to ignore the Rules altogether or simply fail to follow the correct Rules procedure. All golfers are encouraged to learn, apply and honor the Rules as they define this game we all love.



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A RULES Q&A

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Q. What are the consequences if a ball moves after address?

A. Rule 18-2 b, Ball Moving After Address, states that if a player's ball in play moves after he has addressed it (other than as a result of a stroke), the player shall be deemed to have moved the ball and shall incur a penalty stroke. The player shall replace the ball unless the movement of the ball occurs after he has begun his swing and he does not discontinue his swing.

Q. If competing in stroke play (e.g., league activity), what is the Rule if I am chipping to the green and a fellow competitor's ball is in my line and he refuses to mark it?

A. According to Rule 22, Ball Interfering with or Assisting Play, any player may:

- lift his ball if he considers that the ball might assist any other player (or)
- have any other ball lifted if he considers that the ball might interfere with his play or assist the play of any other player, but this may not be done while another ball is in motion.

In stroke play, a player required to lift his ball may play first rather than lift. A ball lifted under this Rule shall be re-placed.

Penalty for breach of Rule: in match play, loss of hole; in stroke play, two strokes. Note that this Rule also stipulates that except on the putting green, the ball may not be cleaned while lifted.

Q. If vandalism has left scratches on a green, am I allowed to repair the damage prior to putting or chipping to the hole?

A. Rule 16-1 c, The Putting Green, Repair of Hole Plugs, Ball Marks and Other Damage, permits the player to repair an old hole plug or damage to the putting green caused by the impact of a ball, whether or not the player's ball lies on the putting green. If the ball is moved in the process of such repair, it shall be re-placed, without penalty. Any other damage to the putting green shall not be repaired if it might assist the player in his subsequent play of the hole.

Q. How much time is allowed if a ball is overhanging the hole to see if it will fall into the hole? (We've all seen *Caddyshack*, right?)

A. Rule 16-2, Ball Overhanging Hole, states that when any part of the ball overhangs the lip of the hole, the player is allowed enough time to reach the hole without unreasonable delay and an additional 10 seconds to determine whether the ball is at rest. If by then the ball has not fallen into the hole, it is deemed to be at rest. If the ball subsequently falls into the hole, the player is deemed to have holed out with his last stroke, and he shall add a penalty stroke to his score for the hole; otherwise, there is no penalty under this Rule. (For an explanation of undue delay, see Rule 6-7.)