



The Rules of Golf and Your Golf Course Maintenance Staff

By David Finney
Head Golf Course Superintendent
Lakeview Resort
Morgantown, West Virginia

Editor's Note: This is the third time Dave Finney has had an article in THE GRASS ROOTS, and this one appears here before it will in any other golf course superintendent publication. I feel honored, and I hope our readers all do also. The article Dave wrote about the US Open from a golf course superintendent perspective when it was held at Oakmont generated lots of great comments.

I first made Dave's acquaintance during a chapter publication editors' seminar. Dave was editor of THREE RIVERS GREEN at the time. Although he no longer serves as the editor of that publication, he continues to enjoy writing. He has also spent a lot of time gaining considerable expertise in the rules of golf, and this summer will be serving as a judge at a number of tournament events. It seems a remarkable accomplishment in light of the fact that so many of us are so poorly informed on those rules.

This article by a golf course superintendent was written with golf course superintendents in mind. Keep it close at hand as a handy reference for yourself and for your employees.

Are you ever concerned that the daily maintenance activities of your staff and crew might alter the outcome of a friendly match, or perhaps even effect the outcome of a tournament? What happens if one of your crew rakes a bunker that has a ball lying in it? What's the ruling if your fairway mower runs over and embeds a ball in play, or cuts up a ball in play? How do you respond to the golfers, and how do the golfers decide the outcome of a hole or the match, if one of your crew has inadvertently interfered? Armed with the correct information on the Rules of Golf and how they are applied to everyday situations involving your maintenance crews and their equip-

ment is something you need to know.

I've been a golf course superintendent for over ten years, and a student of the Rules of Golf since 1992 when I began studying the rules in preparation for the GCSAA certification exam. Since that time I have had the opportunity to attend several PGA/USGA four-day Rules Workshops, and was successful in passing the PGA/USGA rules exam this past spring, at the Bethesda Workshop. Although I am not on par with rules authorities such as Clyde Luther or Tom Meeks of the USGA, I have gathered some pertinent information on the rules of golf and how they affect golf course superintendents, our staffs and our daily maintenance operation.

The best piece of information I've ever come across is in the Decisions on the Rules of Golf book. It is Decision 1-4/1 which basically states that "Distraction are a common occurrence which players must accept." This is great; it is sort of a carte blanche for our maintenance operations. What it means is that the noise from a maintenance vehicle passing by a group of golfers, the engine noise from a mower, and even the noises associated with construction such as chain saws are no excuse for a bad shot. Of course, Decision 1-4/1 doesn't give us the right to throw the courtesy normally shown to golfers out the window, but it does say that the noise we make while working on the golf course cannot be used as an excuse for poor play, missed shots or lost matches.

For the most part, our maintenance crews and equipment are considered to be "Outside Agencies." An outside agency is anything that is not part of the match, or in stroke play, not part of the competitor's side. Whenever our crew members or equipment interfere with play of the

ball, rules 18-1 (Ball at Rest Moved by Outside Agency), and 19-1 (Ball in Motion Deflected or Stopped by Outside Agency) will come into play.

Rule 18-1 simply says if a ball that is in play, and at rest is moved by a mower, a utility vehicle or even a crew member (any outside agency), the ball is to be replaced before the player plays another stroke, and there is no penalty to the player.

Rule 19-1 gets a little trickier for the golfer and actually introduces an element of luck into the game. Rule 19-1 says basically that there is no penalty if a ball in motion is accidentally deflected or stopped by an outside agency, and the ball shall be played as it lies. This is referred to as "rub of the green." The term "rub of the green" can mean either good luck or bad luck for the golfer. For instance, if a ball in motion hits the mower while your operator is mowing fairways (in bounds) and is deflected out of bounds, then the ball is out of

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bounds. The golfer must proceed under rule 27-1, take the stroke and distance penalty associated with the ball going out of bounds, and replay the shot from where the original ball was last played. On the other hand, if while mowing fairways your operator pulls over and is sitting out of bounds waiting for the players to go through, if a shot played from in bounds goes out of bounds, hits the mower and is deflected back in bounds, the ball is in bounds and playable.

There are two unique exceptions to rule 19-1, both dealing with a ball in motion landing in or on an outside agency. Rule 19-1(a) basically says that if a ball in motion after a stroke other than on the putting green comes to rest in or on a piece of maintenance equipment, the ball shall be dropped through the green (or placed on the putting green) as near as possible to the spot where the ball landed on the piece of equipment. Rule 19-1(b) says that if a ball in motion after a stroke on a putting green is deflected or stopped by, or comes to rest in or on a piece of maintenance equipment, the stroke

shall be cancelled, the ball replaced and the stroke replayed. In either case, if the ball lands in or on a piece of maintenance equipment and the equipment drives away with the ball, another ball may be substituted with no penalty.

In all instances, if the ball in play is embedded by a piece of maintenance equipment, the golfer is permitted to lift, clean and place the ball without penalty (Rule 20-3(b): Lie of Ball Altered). And if the ball is deemed to be damaged by a mower or any other piece of maintenance equipment, another ball may be substituted (Rule 5-3: Ball Unfit for Play).

Rule 25 is the rule dealing with Abnormal Ground Conditions (casual water, ground under repair, certain damage to the course), and there are a number of interesting decisions based on Rule 25 relating to golf course maintenance. Decision 25/14 defines a "hole made by a greenkeeper" as ground temporarily dug up in connection with course maintenance, such as a hole made in removing turf or a tree stump, laying pipelines, etc.

Decision 25/15 states that an aeration hole is not a hole made by a greenkeeper, therefore relief is not granted. However, a local rule (33-8/32) is suggested which may be adopted by your club that does allow a player to take relief from aeration holes. Naturally, where there are aeration holes, there are aeration plugs. The ruling pertaining to aeration plugs can be found in Decision 23/12. It states that although loose soil is not a loose impediment through the green, aeration plugs are considered to be "compacted soil," so they are considered to be loose impediments, which may be moved away from the ball before making a shot. Just don't move the ball when you move the plugs or you'll be assessed a one stroke penalty under Rule 18-2c (Ball Moved After Touching Loose Impediment).

How should ruts made by tractors be treated under the rules? Decision 25/16 explains that a rut made by a tractor is not a hole made by a greenkeeper. Deep ruts should be declared as ground under repair by
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the committee; however shallow indentations made by greenkeeping equipment is not ground under repair. A ball in a shallow indentation would have to be played as it lies.

Is there relief from a tree stump under the rules? Decision 25/8 says that unless the stump is marked as ground under repair, or is in the process of being removed, there is no relief. A tree stump is nothing more than a short tree, according to the USGA.

Decision 25/11 explains the many ramifications of grass clippings. Grass clippings are only ground under repair if they have been piles for removal. A player is entitled to relief if clippings piles for removal interfere with his stance or swing. Grass clippings are, by definition, loose impediments, whether or not they are piles for removal, and may be removed by the player. But again, don't move the ball when removing loose grass clip-

pings, or you will pick up a penalty stroke under Rule 18-2c.

Have your members ever had to invoke the "leaf rule" in the fall? Actually, there is no such thing. However, the Decisions Book does allow the committee to adopt a local rule to deal with the seasonal problem of leaves. Decision 33-8/31 suggest adoption of a local rule declaring accumulations of leaves through the green to be Ground Under Repair, allowing Rule 25/1 (Abnormal Ground Conditions) to apply.

And finally, what is the ruling if a member of your staff rakes a bunker when the player's ball lies in it, and the raking improves the lie of the ball or the line of play? Decision 13-2/4 states that if the staff member raked the bunker on the instructions, or with the sanction of the player, the player would incur a two stroke or loss of hole penalty. Otherwise, there would be no penalty. If, however, in raking the bunker your staff

member accidentally rakes over the ball, partially burying it, Rule 20-3b applies, the original lie of the ball shall be recreated as nearly as possible, and the ball shall be placed in that lie.

The rules of golf and their application to our side of the business can be involved, even a bit complicated, but always interesting. If a question ever arises at your club regarding your operation and the rules of the game, the best and closest source of information on the rules is your local golf association. In our area of the country, both the West Virginia Golf Association and the Western Pennsylvania Golf Association have knowledgeable, competent rules people on the staff. You can also refer your rules questions directly to the USGA, but keep in mind that the USGA will render a decision only to clubs that conduct their competitions in accordance with the Rules of Golf. ♣

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