



Know Your Rules Terms

Tips on using the rule book to your advantage

BY LORRAINE THIES

THERE ARE 34-FOUR RULES in golf—that’s a lot for one game. But the more you read the *Rules of Golf*, the more you realize just how difficult it is to write the rules for this game. Why is that? Well, for one thing, in stroke play competitions, golf is the only game where the entire field is not competing in the same place. At any given point in time, the four players in one group may be over a mile away from the players in another group. The players in one group have no idea what the rest of the field is doing. The rules are written to protect the field, not the individuals.

Terminology is very important in understanding the rules. Here are two concepts to help you use the USGA Rules of Golf to your advantage.

MUST VS. SHOULD

The rules make reference to the terms “should” and “must.” When you see the term “must” it means that if you don’t follow the rule as written you will immediately incur a penalty. On the other hand, the term “should” refers to a recommen-

dation in order to avoid a possible penalty by subsequent actions of the player.

Rule 6-5 states: “The responsibility for playing the proper ball rests with the player. Each player SHOULD put an identification mark on his ball.” If the player doesn’t identify his ball, there’s no penalty; however, if at some time during the round the player cannot identify the ball as his, then he will incur a penalty.

For example, decision 27/10 describes a situation in which two players in the group are playing identical golf balls. They both drive the ball into the same general area. Neither player has put any identifying marks on the ball; and as a result could not determine which ball belonged to which player. Since neither player could identify a ball as his ball, both were considered lost and both players are penalized under Rule 27-1.

Rule 6-6a states: After a round, “the competitor SHOULD check his score for each hole.” There’s no penalty if he doesn’t. However, if it’s subsequently determined that the scores are incorrect, the player is responsible and is subject to penalty.

Rule 4-4a states that the player MUST start . . . with not more than 14 clubs. If he starts with 15 or more — there is a penalty.

Rule 20-1 states that before lifting, “the position of the ball MUST be marked before it is lifted under a rule that requires it to be replaced.” If the ball is not marked before it’s lifted there is a penalty.

WHERE’S THE BALL

One of the most important things a rules official wants to know when he comes upon a situation that requires a ruling is “where’s the ball?” It’s all about the ball – in each situation, the outcome could be very different depending on the position of the ball.

Your ball is right next to a sprinkler head and you have asked the official for relief from the obstruction which interferes with your stance. Where’s the ball? If it lies in a water hazard, next to a sprinkler head, which is also in the water hazard, you’re not entitled to relief. Now if the ball lies outside that hazard, it doesn’t matter where the sprinkler head is, relief will be granted. (Rule 24-2b)

There is some sand or loose soil between your ball and the hole. Can you remove the sand before playing your ball? Where’s the ball? If it’s on the putting green, then you are permitted to brush aside that sand. If it’s on the fringe, and the sand is between your ball and the green, then you are not permitted to remove that sand. (Definition of Loose Impediments)

A player removes a stick (loose impediment) from a bunker because it interferes with his stance. Is there a penalty? It depends. Where’s the ball? If it’s outside the bunker and the player must stand in the bunker, no problem, he can remove that stick; however, if his ball is also in the bunker then there’s a penalty if he moves it (Rule 23-1).

So the next time you pull out your rule book, these two concepts can help you figure out how to proceed. ■

Want to host a rules seminar at your club? Contact Ginger Monroy at the AGA office by calling 602.944.3035 or 800.458.8484.