

# The Golf Rules Review

An Intermittent Communique by the 2020 WWGA Golf Rules Maven

Issue IV

## Oh What a Relief it Is!.....Free Relief

You have probably heard the saying “Play the Golf Course as you find it”. Sometimes you don’t want to play the course as you find it. You want to move your ball and hit from a different spot, i.e. you want relief. The bad news is you often incur a penalty stroke(s). The good news is under certain circumstances you can move your ball without penalty. These circumstances are referred to as “Abnormal Course Conditions” and the relief is called Free Relief which is the topic for this issue of The Golf Rules Review.

### When do I get Free Relief?

Free Relief is available when your ball lies in an "abnormal course conditions" in any area on the golf course that is not a staked penalty area. This area includes bunkers. However, it is not get out of jail free card for another course condition. When it is clearly unreasonable to play your ball because of another condition, such as your ball is in a bush, then an abnormal course condition cannot be used to get free relief.

### What are the defined abnormal course conditions?

1. Ground marked as under repair in white paint.
2. Ground not marked under repair but defined as an unusual course condition in which the Committee or local rules allow taking Free Relief.
3. Sensitive areas such as new grass, young tree plantings, flower beds. No one really wants to see golfers hacking away in flower beds, tromping on new grass and killing young tree plantings the maintenance crew just planted. The Chestnut tree planting area between Holes 12 and 15 on Mountain View is an example.
4. Your ball lands on or near the wrong green and you would have to stand on the green to hit your next shot. To prevent damage to the green, you must take free relief so you do not stand or hit from on the green.
5. Any animal holes or tracks (except insects and worms) which affect with your intended lie, stance or swing, including the ball lying in the animal hole or track. “Yes!”, you get relief for your ball in that deer track in the bunker.
6. A dangerous animal outside a penalty area (e.g. a snake, skunk, stinging insect nest/hive or in Florida it is often gators) that is near your ball.
7. Casual water outside a staked penalty area.
8. Immoveable Obstructions which are man-made objects that can’t be moved, but interfere with your lie, stance or swing. Examples are sprinkler heads, french drains not marked or staked as penalty areas, trash cans, cart paths or fences.

### Did You Know....

The WWGA’s web-site has all the local rules for the golf courses at The Woods. This includes the local rules for Free Relief which are shown here.

- Posts marking paths
  - Drainage grates
  - Drains
  - Drainage Inlets
  - Unmarked French drains (which is Mt. View right rough on hole 1)
  - Cart Paths and Roads
  - Timber Edging
  - Fences
  - Landscaping stones
  - Turf torn up by animals
  - Bunkers under repair
  - The Chestnut tree area on Mt View between holes 12 and 15.
  - Balls in aeration holes maybe lifted and clean and dropped no nearer to the holes
  - Balls on the green in an aeration holes maybe placed at the nearest spot that avoids the situation no near to the hole.
- Local rules also prohibit play from ground under repair.

## Lose Impediments

are natural objects found on the course such as leaves, fallen tree branches, or rocks. You can remove them from around your ball, but if your ball moves while doing so, it's a 1 stroke penalty and you must put the ball back to its original spot. You may do this anywhere in the course, even in Penalty Areas and Bunkers.

## Moveable Obstructions

are man made objects on course such as rakes, stakes, distance markers, towels or trash left on the course that can be move. You can remove these items anywhere on the course and if your ball moves just put your ball back. It is a one stroke penalty if you do not put your ball back. Tee markers and course boundary stakes are not moveable obstructions and should not be moved. These items are fixed and any deliberate movement would be altering the course.

## What are my options for taking relief from an abnormal course condition?

1. Follow the process below for taking "Free Relief"
2. Or, play the ball as it lies, unless your ball is on the wrong putting green or the local rules state free relief must be taken (e.g. the chestnut tree planting area on Mountain View).

## What is the process for taking Free Relief?

There are 4 steps:

1. Before you pick up your ball, put a tee down next to your ball to mark it.
2. Determine the **Nearest Point of Complete Relief** (NPR) from your ball, no closer to the hole. You might want to mark your NPR with a tee.
3. Decide whether you want to play from the NPR or play the ball as it lies.  
*If you picked up your ball without marking it before determining your NPR, you will not be able to your play your ball as it lies.*
4. If you decide to play from the NPR, then drop the ball from knee height within 1 club length from your NPR, no closer to the hole. Under the 2019 revised rules, use your longest club ( but not your putter) to determine 1 club length. Prior to 2019, you had to measure using the club you would have most likely used for the shot.

## How do I determine the NPR?

NPR is the spot that is the shortest distance from where your ball lies (either left, right or behind) that is no closer to the hole, where if your ball were lying there, you could make a stroke without any interference from what you are taking relief from.

- Technically, there is only one point of NPR.
- There is no guarantee the NPR will give you a good lie or a clear shot to the hole.
- The NPR may be different for right handed players versus left handed players.
- You must take complete relief for both your lie, swing and stance. For example you can't have one foot on ground under repair or the cart path and the other foot off.

*Did you realize... Taking complete relief for your lie, stance and swing only applies to "Free Relief"*

## Can I clean or change my ball when taking Free Relief?

Yes

## How deep must casual water be before I can take Free Relief?

Casual water must be visible to the player before or after they take their stance. Sometimes casual water is not visible before you take your stance. To determine if you are in casual water, take your stance, and then lift up one heel and then try the other. If you see a puddle under either of your heels, you are in casual water.

## Creating Interference to Alleviate Mental Interference

Sometimes a golfer is close to a abnormal condition where they could get free relief, except it doesn't really interfere with their lie, stance or swing. But it bothers them (grrr). This bothersome situation is known as mental interference.

You think if I could just take my longest club, stick my butt way out and stretch my arms I could show the immoveable obstruction is in the way. Or, if instead of my normal shoulder width apart stance, I could say I was going to play the shot with my feet tightly together, to gain free relief from the sprinkler head between my feet.

Unfortunately you cannot get Free Relief by creating interference with an unreasonable choice of club, stance, swing or direction of play.

While there isn't any relief in the rules of golf for mental interference, there's always the 19<sup>th</sup> hole.

### Where is the NPR if my ball is in a bunker with casual water?

You must find the NPR in the bunker, and you must hit from in the bunker for free relief.

- This may prevent you from having a full club length.
- If the entire bunker is full of water, then find the NPR spot in the bunker with the least amount of water.
- The only way you can play outside the bunker is with penalty stroke. This may not sound fair, but getting a free drop outside the bunker would give you an unfair advantage versus other players who avoided the bunker.

### What if my ball is near a dangerous animal, how do I take relief?

Move away from that critter until you feel safe, but are no nearer to the hole. This will be your NPR, then drop your ball.

### My ball was near a sprinkler head and my feet had to straddle the sprinkler head to hit the ball, do I get free relief?

No, because the sprinkler head was not interfering with your lie, swing or stance. Sprinkler heads can sometimes present mental interference rather than an actual lie, swing or stance interference. See side bar.

### What is the NPR for Out of Bounds or Tee Box markers.

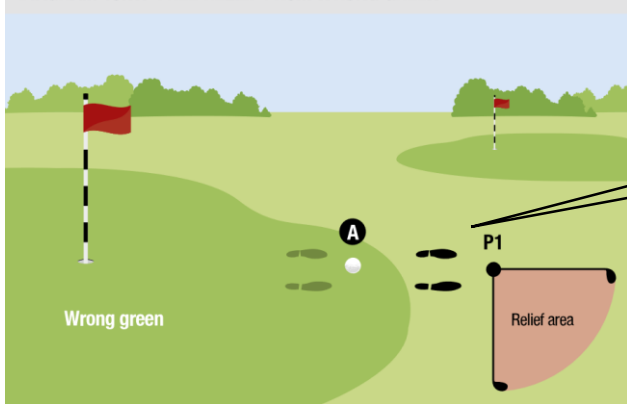
Out of bound fences, posts or other objects that define the course boundary as well as tee box markers are normal course conditions so you do not get Free Relief.

### What if my ball is resting against a Penalty stake?

If your ball is touching the penalty boundary, you are in the hazard so no free relief. But if the ball is not in the hazard, but the stake is in the way of your swing, you may remove the stake as a moveable obstruction (see side bar). Or you may take Free Relief, find the NPR and drop within 1 club length.

### Where is the NPR if your ball lands on the wrong green?

DIAGRAM 13.1f: FREE RELIEF FROM WRONG GREEN



When there is interference by a wrong green, free relief must be taken. The diagram assumes a right-handed player. Ball A lies on the wrong green, and the nearest point of complete relief for Ball A is at P1, which must be in the same area of the course where the original ball came to rest (in this case, the general area).

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### Do I get free relief if my ball lands on a bridge?

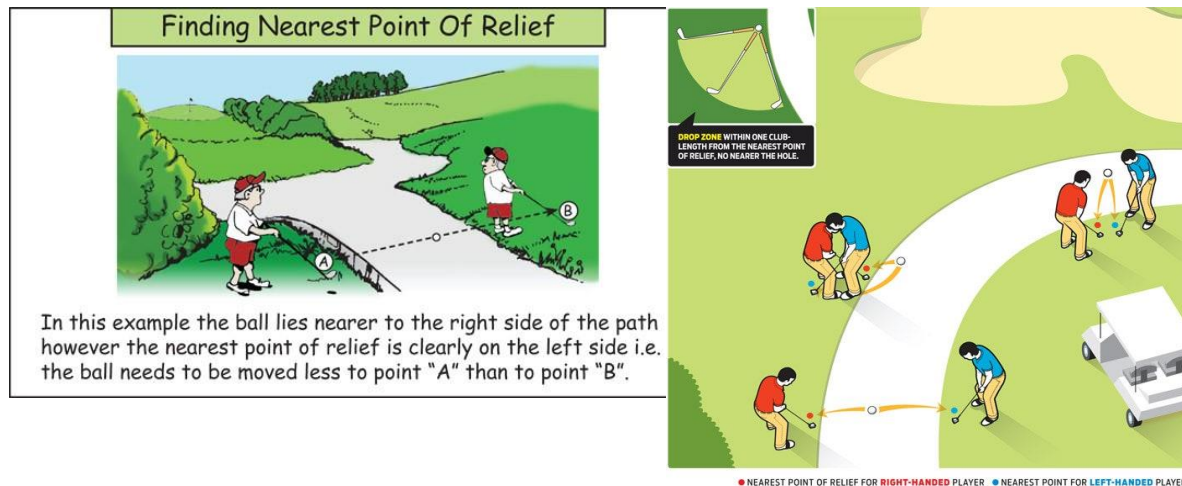
Yes, bridges are immovable obstructions. However, you do not get free relief if the portion of the bridge where your ball has landed is within the margin of a staked penalty area. You still have the option to play your ball as it lies.

### On a course I played, electrical wires ran along side the hole. Do I get Free Relief if the ball hits the wire and knocks it down?

No, you do not get relief for ball flight, play the ball as it lies. However, check your scorecard for a local rule. Often the local rule will state you can replay the shot without penalty.

### What is the NPR for cart paths?

Cart paths are unique because the side you might want to drop your ball, might not be the NPR. In the example below for a right handed golfer, the ball is slightly closer to the right side of the path but once the player takes their stance, the NPR is to the left of the cart path. The second diagram illustrates some of these differences between the NPR for right versus left handed golfers.



### Could you summarize Free Relief?

- Free Relief is available for abnormal course conditions.
- Decide whether to take free relief or play the ball as it lies
- If you take relief, find the nearest point of relief (NPR) to the ball, no closer to the hole.
- Drop the ball from knee height within 1 club length of the NPR no closer to the hole.