

The Golf Rules Review

An Intermittent Communique by the 2020 WWGA Golf Rules Maven

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Back to the Basics The First Rule of Golf – Applying Penalties

Having finished the rules on taking relief, I thought it's time to start reviewing penalties. So, let's go back to the basics. The first rule in The Rules of Golf introduces the three central principles of the game.

1. Play the course as you find it and play your ball as it lies.
2. Play by the Rules and the Spirit of the Game
3. You are responsible for applying your own penalties to prevent you from having a potential advantage over other players when you break a rule.

The third principle, applying penalties, is the subject of this issue of The Golf Rules Review.

Playing by The Rules

As a player, you are expected to:

1. Know the rules
2. Know when you have broken a rule
3. Be honest in applying the rules and your own penalties.

Here are the **Do's** and **Don't's**

- **Do** take a penalty when you break a rule. That's the spirit of the game.
- **Do** take a penalty when your caddie, or any person at your request helps you and while helping, breaks a rule. For example, you ask another player to help remove a loose impediment by your ball and they accidentally move your ball. You must take a penalty for moving your ball even though you did not actually do it.
- **Do** ask another player for help with a rule if you are uncertain about a rule. If help is not available, then continue playing and raise it with an expert (e.g. the Pro) later.
 - In stroke play, if you and another player differ in a rules interpretation, you may play 2 balls under each interpretation and ask for a ruling later on which score will stand.
 - In Match Play when you and your opponent differ on interpreting a rule, come to an agreement on how to proceed. As long as you do not deliberately apply the rules in the wrong way, honest mistakes are okay. Playing 2 balls is not okay and is loss of hole for that player.
- **Do** use your best judgement in making estimates such as the point your ball went in the water and where to drop your ball.
 - Golf is a game of integrity. As long as you were reasonable given the circumstances at the time, your estimate will stand even if new information later arises that shows you were wrong.
 - If you find out your estimate was wrong before you make your stroke, then it must be corrected.

Please Don't Ask Me That!

I was playing in the Tuesday Game and a player asked, "Are you going to assess me a penalty if I ...". What should I say?

Golf is the only sport that expects players to demonstrate integrity, honesty and fairness during play. In no other sport is the player their own referee and are expected to know the rules and assess their own penalties regardless of the outcome on their score.

Bending the rules isn't golf. Asking someone to ignore a penalty for you isn't golf. Rule infractions are just a part of golf and everyone gets them.

Pros are often celebrated in the news media when they assess themselves a costly penalty that could have gone unnoticed. But to the Pro, this praise is unnecessary... they were just playing golf ... integrity is integral to the game.

So, don't be afraid of penalties. Let them be reflected in your score and your handicap. Learn the rules. Don't wait for your playing partners to identify your penalties nor ask them to agree with you to ignore the rules. What you do during casual play is up to you. But, if you wait until a tournament to start playing by the rules you will certainly lose.

Applying Penalties – Do's & Don'ts (continued)

- **Do** try to stop a player from breaking a rule before it happens. It is just good sportsmanship and is not giving advice. For example:
 - When they are setting up outside the teeing area or at the wrong hole.
 - If they are taking relief where it is not allowed
 - Reminding them to move their ball marker back before they putt.
- **Do** tell a player when they are breaking a rule so they can stop doing it again.
- **Don't** deliberately ignore a penalty for a rule you have broken. In many cases, you must correct your mistake before you tee off on the next hole or you will be disqualified.
- **Don't** agree in advance with another player to ignore any rules or penalties or you both will be disqualified.
 - You will not be disqualified if you both agree to waive or ignore a rule you did not know exist. For example, in Match Play the players agree in advance to concede all puts “inside the leather”, and are unaware the rules prohibit this agreement.
- **Don't** ask another player to be complicit in ignoring a rule by saying “Are you going to assess me a penalty for ...” In Stroke Play or Match Play Tournaments, both players can be disqualified for agreeing not to follow a rule or take a penalty.

Protecting the Field

What if you are playing in a League or in a Tournament and one person is **not** following the rules, but everyone else is... not very fair is it? “Protecting the Field” ensures all players are treated equally and play under the same rules. It is the responsibility of each golfer to ensure another player does not have an advantage because they're not following the rules.

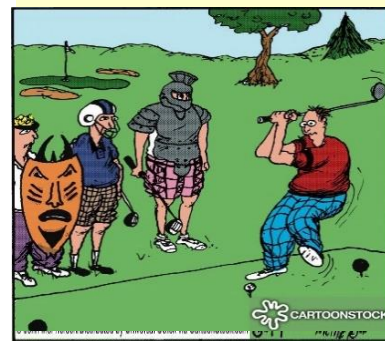
- In a Stroke Play format, players only know what is happening in their own foursome, not rest of the field. So during League or Tournament play, each player must protect the rest of the field by politely challenging another player in their foursome who may have broken a rule.
 - If you call out another player for possibly breaking a rule, be timely and be polite. They often aren't aware they did it. Try to stop the breach before it occurs.
 - Likewise, if you are called out, accept the penalty and don't let it ruin your game. Remember, it's just golf. If you disagree with the other player, play a second ball if necessary and then discuss it with the Pro at the end of the round.
- In Match Play, all opponents are playing on the same hole at once. Each player's self interest will prevent their opponent from having an unfair advantage in the application (or not) of the rule. But, your self interest is best served if you know the rules!

Any Observer of the Tournament can “Protect the Field”

It could be a parent watching their child play in a school tournament. It could be a caddie or a spotter. It could even be someone sitting on the deck behind hole 18 on Mt. View reporting a breach (which has happened).

Until 2018, TV viewers often called in or emailed about a LPGA/PGA Pro's infraction during a tournament that was not discernable to the player. These were very controversial and not always timely. To add insult to injury, the player also got a 2 stroke penalty for signing an incorrect scorecard for the penalty strokes not included in their score for the breach they weren't aware of. In fact in 2017, Lexi Thompson lost an LPGA Major for this very reason. Both Tours no longer field queries from viewers and use their own experts to monitor televised events. The revised 2019 rules provides a local rule that eliminates the 2 stroke penalty for signing an incorrect scorecard when the player was unaware a breach had occurred.

Not quite what is meant by “Protecting the Field”



Bob was notorious for having wildly erratic drives.