

The Golf Rules Review

An Intermittent Communique by the 2020 WWGA Golf Rules Maven

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MATCH PLAY CONCESSIONS AND OTHER KEY DIFFERENCES VERSUS STROKE PLAY

Issue XVII on Match Play covered how to apply handicap strokes and how to keep score during a match. This issue of The Golf Rules Review (TGRR) covers four areas where the rules are quite different for Match Play versus Stroke Play. These areas are concession, order of play, protecting the field, and information as to strokes taken. The next issue of TGRR will cover how penalties for a breach of the rules differ in Stroke Play versus Match Play.

Concessions

Match Play has concessions which is a word to describe “It’s yours, let’s move on” when it is obvious to the player that their opponents is going to make a putt, or win the hole or even the match. The player may concede their opponents next stroke, or the hole or the entire match. Concessions are given before the stroke is made, not retroactively. When a concession is given, play on the hole or match has ended.

- Once the concession is made by a player, it cannot be withdrawn. Concessions are given, but sadly not requested.
 - Even if it looks like the player who made the concession is continuing to play the hole that will not negate the concession.
 - After a concession is made, players cannot agree to cancel a concession, because they found out new information. Done is done. If they agree to cancel a concession both players are disqualified for agreeing not to follow the rules of golf.
- Concessions can be done verbally or by an action that clearly shows the player’s intent to concede a hole. For example, you could concede a stroke by deliberately stopping an opponent’s ball from going in the hole.
- Only the player or their teammate may make a concessions, not their caddies.
- Putt concessions happen all the time in Match Play. When given, the receiving player’s ball is considered holed and the hole is over. “Pick it up” or “It’s good” are often used to concede a putt, but you could also deliberately stop their ball going in the hole.
 - “It’s good” can also be misinterpreted. For example if a player has a long putt and lags it close to the hole, the opponent may say “good” referring to the putt, not necessarily conceding the next putt.
 - If a player lifts their ball because of a reasonable misunderstanding that the opponent was conceding the stroke or the hole, the player can replace their ball without penalty.
- Conceding the next stroke can happen provided your opponent’s ball is at rest. When conceding at this point, the ball is considered to have been holed out.
 - Picking up your Opponent’s ball in the mistaken belief you have won the hole is not considered a concession.
 - If you did and said “my hole” and your opponent pointed out you were wrong, you must replace your opponent’s ball and take a 1 stroke penalty for purposely touching your opponent’s ball.
 - If you did it based on the wrong information from your opponent on the status of the hole, then you win the hole because they gave you wrong information (see below).
- Hole concessions are less frequent. A hole concession is the same as “waving a white flag” or saying “Uncle”.
 - For example, if on hole #9 your opponent made it over the water in one, and you’re still struggling after 3 tries, you should concede the hole.

Schools of Thoughts on Conceding Putts

1. Never concede a putt.
The theory here is that every putt can be missed so none are conceded. Of course for players in this school of thought, their opponent catches on quickly and also never concedes a putt.
2. Concede every short putt. This player will always concedes putts of a certain distance (6 inches, a foot, it varies by player). Does it to speed up play and is probably an experienced player.
3. Concede putts early but not late. – This theory is to deny your opponent the opportunity to get comfortable over the short putts. Making them putt those short ones later in the match when the pressure is high might make them prone to miss.

Or the Gary McCord school of thought on conceding putts. “Ask yourself whether you’d fancy hitting the same putt. If the answer is “no” or even “not really” say nothing and watch.”

Match Play Strategy

If you look this up on the internet you may see articles on how to dominate your opponent. Often they provide mind games you can play such as “ignore your Opponent”, how to “psych out your opponent. Generally in the WWGA, we leave trash talk and minds games to the Pros. The people we play with are our friends and neighbors. Win or lose why let them go away upset because you tried to psych them out.

So here are some Match Play strategies that will help you without annoying your opponent.

1. Remember, anyone can be beaten in Match Play.
2. When in doubt, go with your safe shot. If you are more comfortable playing alongside the water on SL hole #9, do it. Let your opponent take the risk over water.
3. If you are leading, don't get ahead of yourself. Play one hole at a time, so your opponent feels like they have to play their best to beat you.
4. Don't let your opponent's lead or good shot rattle you. Anything can happen in match play.
5. Expect your opponent to make everything. So keep grinding and stay focused.
6. Having a bad hole...take a slow deep breath and shake your arms before your next shot. Relax!
7. Be gracious at the end of the match, you each tried your best.

- Hole concessions may happen any time prior to the start of the hole, or prior to the conclusion of the hole.
- If you have already won or lost a hole before you gave or received a concession, the concession doesn't count.
 - This could occur if you are not aware of all the strokes your opponent may have. For example, you're on the green in 5 and your opponent in 2, but their second shot was from the rough, so you concede the hole. You then find out your opponent played the wrong ball from the rough. This is a loss of hole penalty, so your opponent already lost the hole before reaching the green.
- Match concessions are rare. They may happen because of an injury or illness of a player during the match. However, just giving up because you think you may not make up the holes you have lost is considered bad form.

Order of Play

In Stroke Play you may play out of order on a hole without any penalty. In fact this is encouraged to speed up play. In Match Play, playing “Honors” i.e. who hits first, is fundamental to the game. It is fundamental because knowing what your opponent has done determines your strategy for playing your next shot. Players may agree to not play honors to speed up the game, but it is to their detriment to do so. Here is how to play honors:

- On the first tee, honors shall be determined by a flip of a coin or a tee. After that the player who won the previous hole shall have the honor. In case of a tie, honors remain with the player who previously held the honor.
- During play on a hole, the player furthest away from the hole plays first. In Stroke Play players often wait for everyone to get on the green before putting. In Match Play, if a player is off the green but closer to the hole than their opponent on the green, the player on the green would hit first.
- If a player needs to play a provisional ball from the Tee, they must wait until their opponent has hit their tee shot.
- Players are not playing out of turn, if when they hit their shot, they were unaware their opponent's ball was lost and would have to go back re-play their shot. In this case, the player based their decision on the relative position of the original shots.
- When both player's balls go into a penalty area, (e.g water or environmental area) the relative position is unknown, then flip a coin to determine who plays next.

Penalty for Playing Out of Turn - The opponent may let it stand or require the player to cancel the stroke and play in the correct order. If you hit a good shot out of turn, chances are your opponent will have you cancel and replay the shot. If in doubt as to who is away, get confirmation from your opponent.

Playing from the Wrong Tee

If a player plays from the wrong tee or outside the teeing ground, the opponent may let it stand or require the player to cancel the stroke and play from the correct tee. There are no penalty strokes for this.

Forget Protecting the Field, Its “Mano a Mano” in Match Play

Unlike Stroke Play, the concept of Protecting the Field (see Issue VIII Back to the Basics) does not apply. You are not obligated to let your Opponent know if they unknowingly broke a rule. Players in a match are going head to head so it is in their own interest to call penalties on their opponents.

- If you are playing with someone who is always unknowingly grounding their club in the bunker, you can ignore it. You are only hurting yourself, not the entire field as in Stroke Play.
 - If you observe a rules breach and want to call it on your opponent, do it as soon as it occurs. The very latest you may call a breach on your opponent is before the next hole starts.
For example, you are having a bad hole. You are in the bunker and hit, but the ball doesn't get out. In a fit of annoyance you reverse swing and accidentally swipe the sand. Your opponent sees this says nothing. You don't call the penalty on yourself because you are too focused on your bad swing. Miraculously you win the hole and 2 holes later your opponent says, when you were in the bunker and swiped at the sand, isn't that a penalty. You think back as say, "hmmmm, I forgot I did that, I think you're right". Unfortunately for your opponent, even though that penalty would have been loss of the hole, the fact that they did not raise it before the start of the next hole, means the results of that earlier hole stands.
- Once the rules breach is pointed out to the Opponent, any breaches thereafter cannot be ignored and would result in loss of the hole for the Opponent.
- As a player you still cannot knowingly break rules in hopes that your Opponent will not notice. Golf is a game of honor and you still must call penalties on yourself and tell you opponent when you do.

Likewise you and your partner cannot knowingly agree to disregard a rule you know.

Examples are:

- At the start of the match you agree to give each other putts "inside the leather".
- You get to hole #9, you both look at the water and decide to skip the hole and call it a tie. However, if you both start the hole and each put balls in the water and may know that neither will get over, you could stop the nonsense by agreeing the hole is tied and move on to the next hole. You just can't call it a tie without even starting, one of you has to start.

Penalty for Agreeing to Disregard a Rule - Disqualification

Information as to Strokes Taken

In Stroke Play if you give the wrong information to your opponent as to how many strokes you have taken while you are still playing the hole, there is no penalty. In Match Play, opponents are entitled to ask you how many strokes you have taken. Opponents rely on this information to decide their strategy for playing the hole.

- When asked, you must accurately tell your opponent the number of strokes including penalties before they hit their next shot. If you have finished the hole you must tell them before they tee off on the next hole. If you ignore their request or refuse to give your opponent the information, you lose the hole.
- Likewise, if you incur a penalty, your opponent may not be aware of, you must tell them as soon as reasonable possible. For example, your opponent may not see you accidentally moved your ball when removing loose impediments (1 stroke penalty) or when you accidentally grounded your club in the bunker (which is loss of the hole). You are still obligated to tell your opponent before they make a stroke or takes action such as conceding a stroke to you since such concession was done without vital information i.e. your penalty stroke.
- There is no penalty for failing to tell your Opponent about a penalty if they knew that you had a penalty. For example, taking relief from a penalty hazard or out of bounds.

Penalty for Giving the Wrong Information – Loss of hole.

Combining Match Play with a Stroke Play event

The USGA and R&A

discourages combining the 2 formats into one event because the rules are not compatible. For example:

- Concessions are not allowed in stroke play but are allowed in match play. You don't have to finish a hole to win a match, but you do in stroke play.
- Honors are not required in stroke play, but in match play, you could have a player re-play their shot for not playing honors.
- Ignoring a rules breach by your opponent is allowed in match play, whereas in stroke play you must call it on a player to protect the field.

If the 2 formats are combined into one event then the USGA states the rules for stroke play should be applied throughout the event. So, no concessions, no recalling a stroke for playing out of order and no ignoring a rules breach.

