

# STROKE PLAY

Quick Reference ❖ Rules of Golf 2023

## THE RULES IN STROKE PLAY

1) **KNOWING THE RULES** Players are responsible for knowing the Rules. In stroke play, they may not ignore a Rule or a penalty and they may not agree with another player to ignore a Rule or penalty. Also, in stroke play, unlike in match play, players may not decide Rules issues by mutual agreement. (R1.3b & R20.1c1)

In stroke play, if a player suspects that another player has broken a Rule and may not know it or is ignoring a Rule, they have an obligation to the other players in the competition to promptly tell that player or inform the Committee. (R20.1c2)

2) **PLAYING TWO BALLS** In stroke play, if a player is uncertain about the correct procedure while playing a hole, before making another stroke, they should 1) indicate their intention to play two balls, 2) announce which ball they wish to count, and 3) hole out both balls. The player must inform the Committee. (R20.1c3)

## TWO MOVABLE THINGS

3) **LOOSE IMPEDIMENTS** Anywhere on or off the course, a player may carefully move a loose or unattached natural object (*e.g., a leaf, a stone, or an insect*). However, if when moving a loose impediment the ball moves, they get **one penalty stroke** and the ball must be replaced, (*except on the putting green where there is no penalty and the ball must be replaced.*) (R15.1)

4) **MOVABLE OBSTRUCTIONS** Anywhere on or off the course, a player may move an easily-moved artificial object (*e.g., a gate, a bunker rake, or a penalty area stake, but never a white boundary stake*). If when moving a movable obstruction the ball moves, there is no penalty and the ball must be replaced. (R15.2)

## FOUR WRONG THINGS

5) **WRONG TEE** If a player plays from the wrong tee or from outside the teeing area, they get **two penalty strokes** and must correct their mistake before starting the next hole by playing from within the correct teeing area. (R6.1b2)

6) **WRONG BALL** If a player plays the “wrong ball” (*e.g., a stray ball or another player’s ball*) they get **two penalty strokes** and must correct their mistake before starting the next hole by going back and finding their original ball and continuing play of the hole with that ball. (R6.3c)

7) **WRONG PLACE** If a player plays a ball from a “slightly wrong place” (*e.g., by playing a ball without replacing it when required to do so*), they get **two penalty strokes** and must continue playing the hole with that ball.

However, if they have played from a “seriously wrong place” (*e.g., by playing a ball from much nearer the hole than the “right place”*), they get **two penalty strokes** and must correct their mistake before starting the next hole by completing play of the hole with a ball from the “right place.” The player must inform the Committee. (R14.7b)

8) **WRONG GREEN** A player may not play from any practice green or any green on the course other than the one for the hole being played. They must take free relief for lie, stance, and swing by dropping a ball into the one club-length relief area behind the nearest point of complete relief. (R13.1f)

## THE PLAYER’S CLUB IS DAMAGED

9) **2023 revised Rule.** If a player’s club is damaged during their round, except in cases of abuse, they may repair it or replace it with another club. (R4.1a2 & C4.1a2/1)

## THE PLAYER’S BALL MOVED

10) **BALL MOVED DURING SEARCH** If a player (*or anyone else*) accidentally moves the player’s ball while trying to find it there is no penalty and the ball must be replaced. (R7.4)

11) **BALL MOVED BY PLAYER** Usually, if a player picks up or deliberately touches their ball when not allowed by a Rule, or either accidentally or intentionally causes it to move, they get **one penalty stroke** and they must replace the ball. (R9.4)

12) **BALL ON PUTTING GREEN MOVED** On the green, if a player (*or anyone else*) accidentally causes the player’s ball or ball-marker to move, there is no penalty and the ball or ball-marker must be replaced. (R13.1d1)

However, if a player deliberately picks up, moves, or rotates their ball on the green without first marking it, they get **one penalty stroke** and they must replace the ball. (R14.1a)

13) **BALL MOVED ON ITS OWN** If a player’s ball is moved by the natural forces of wind, water, or gravity, there is no penalty and the ball usually is played from its new location. (R9.3)

Although, on the green, if a player’s ball moves on its own after having been lifted and replaced, the player may not play the ball from the new location. There is no penalty and the ball must be replaced. (R9.3, Exc. 1)

**2023 new Rule.** On other areas of the course, if the player puts a ball into play by dropping, placing, or replacing it and then natural forces cause the ball to move and come to rest in another area of the course or out of bounds, there is no penalty and the ball must be replaced. (R9.3, Exc. 2)

14) **BALL MOVED BY OUTSIDE INFLUENCE** If a player knows or is virtually certain that their ball has been moved or taken by someone or something else, there is no penalty and the ball must be replaced. (R9.6, C9.2b/1 & R6.3c2)

15) **BALL MOVED BY ANOTHER BALL** If a player’s ball is moved by another ball or if their ball accidentally hits another ball the “moved” ball must be replaced. Usually there is no penalty. (See #18, Note 1.) The ball that did the “hitting” is played as it lies. (R9.6 & R11.1)

## THE PLAYER’S BALL HIT SOMETHING

16) **DOUBLE HIT** If a player accidentally hits their ball more than once with their stroke it is treated as only a single stroke. There is no penalty and the ball is played as it lies. (R10.1a)

17) **BALL HIT THE PLAYER OR THEIR EQUIPMENT** If the player’s ball accidentally hits them or their equipment, there is no penalty and the ball is played as it lies. (R11.1a)

18) **BALL HIT SOMEONE OR SOMETHING** If a player’s ball accidentally hits another player, their equipment, or anyone or anything else, usually there is no penalty to anyone and the ball is played as it lies. (R11.1a)

*Note 1: If a ball played from on the green hits another ball at rest on the green, the player gets two penalty strokes and their ball is played as it lies. The moved ball must be replaced.* (R11.1a, Exc.)

*Note 2: If a ball played from on the green hits any of the following on the green: anyone other than the player or person attending the flagstick, or a movable obstruction other than their club, a ball-marker, the flagstick, or an animal other than an insect. There is no penalty and the player must replay the stroke.* (R11.1b2)

19) **CLEANING THE BALL** A ball lifted from the putting green may always be cleaned. A ball lifted from anywhere else may always be cleaned **except** if it is lifted 1) to see if it is cut or cracked, 2) to identify it, 3) because it interferes with play, or 4) to see if it lies in condition where free relief is allowed. (R14.1c)

## TWO RELIEF CONCEPTS

20) **NEAREST POINT OF COMPLETE RELIEF (NPCR)** is the reference point used to establish the relief area for taking free relief from 1) an abnormal course condition, 2) a dangerous animal condition, 3) a wrong green, or 4) a no play zone. It will be both as near as possible to the original lie and to the spot where there is no interference with the player's lie, stance, and swing. (A good or playable lie is not guaranteed.) (NPCR/4)

21) **RELIEF AREA** is where a player drops a ball when taking free relief or penalty relief. A relief area starts from a reference point and usually has a radius of one club-length. (Although, when taking lateral penalty relief from the reference point at the edge of a red penalty area or from the spot of an unplayable ball, the radius is two club-lengths.) The ball must be dropped from knee height into and come to rest within the relief area. The player may use their original ball or another ball. (R14.3)

## TWO FREE RELIEF SITUATIONS

22) **THE FOUR ABNORMAL COURSE CONDITIONS (ACC)** are 1) animal holes, 2) ground under repair, 3) immovable obstructions, and 4) temporary water.

Free relief for interference for lie, stance, and swing is normally available from an ACC anywhere on the course except when the player's ball lies in a penalty area.

There is no free relief from objects defining the course boundaries, from objects located out of bounds, or from integral objects. There is usually no free relief for line of play, except on or near the putting green and for temporary immovable obstructions.

There is no free relief when other circumstances make it clearly unreasonable for the player to play the ball. (R16.1a)

**General Area: Abnormal Course Conditions** If a player's ball lies in the general area and there is interference by an ACC, they may take free relief by dropping a ball into the one club-length relief area behind the NPCR. (R16.1b)

**Bunker: Abnormal Course Conditions** If a player's ball lies in a bunker and there is interference by an ACC, they may take free relief within the bunker by dropping a ball into the one club-length relief area behind the NPCR. (R16.1c1)

Or, for **one penalty stroke**, a player may take relief outside the bunker by stroke-and-distance or by dropping back-on-the-line. (R16.1c2)

**Putting Green: Abnormal Course Conditions** If a player's ball lies on the green and there is interference by an ACC, including on the line of play, they may take free relief by placing a ball on the spot of the NPCR. (Note: The NPCR could be either on the green or in the general area.) (R16.1d)

**Ball Not Found in Abnormal Course Conditions** If a player knows or is virtually certain that their ball is in an ACC but they cannot find it, they still may take free relief.

The player must estimate the point where the ball last crossed the edge of the ACC, then drop a ball into the one club-length relief area behind that NPCR. (R16.1e)

23) **THE PLAYER'S BALL IS EMBEDDED** Free relief is available for a ball embedded in its own pitch-mark in the general area, (but never for a ball in a bunker or penalty area.) (R16.3a1, Exc.)

The player must drop a ball into the one club-length relief area behind the spot where the ball is embedded. (R16.3b)

☛ **2023 new procedure.** If the spot immediately behind where the ball is embedded is not in the general area there is a free relief procedure described in Clarification 16.3b/1.

## THE THREE PENALTY RELIEF OPTIONS

24) **STROKE-AND-DISTANCE** is the penalty relief procedure by which a player takes relief by playing a ball from where their previous stroke was made.

- 1) From the tee, a they may re-tee and replay from anywhere within the teeing area.
- 2) In the general area or a penalty area or a bunker, drop a ball into the one club-length relief area right behind the spot from where the previous stroke was made.
- 3) On the green, place a ball on the spot from where the previous stroke was made. (R14.6)

☛ Also, at any time and from anywhere and for any reason, for **one penalty stroke**, a player always has the replay option. (R18.1)

25) **BACK-ON-THE-LINE** is the second of the penalty relief options and involves going back on an extension of the line from the flagstick through either:

- 1) the last crossing point at the edge of a penalty area, or
- 2) the spot of the player's original unplayable ball.

☛ **2023 revised procedure.** The player may go back on that line as far as they wish and drop a ball on the line. The ball must come to rest within one club-length in any direction from where it first touched the ground. (R17.1d2)

26) **LATERAL** is the third of the penalty relief options and lets a player drop a ball into a relief area of two club-lengths to the side of and behind the reference point of either:

- 1) the last crossing point at the edge of a red penalty area, or
- 2) the spot of the player's original unplayable ball. (R17.1d3)

## THE THREE PENALTY RELIEF RULES

27) **THE PLAYER'S BALL LIES IN PENALTY AREA** A penalty area is any body of water on the course or any other part of the course the Committee marks as a penalty area. Penalty areas are marked as either yellow or red penalty areas.

**Yellow Penalty Area** If a player knows or is virtually certain that their ball is in a yellow penalty area, for **one penalty stroke**, they may take relief outside that penalty area in two ways: stroke-and-distance or back-on-the-line.

**Red Penalty Area** If a player knows or is virtually certain that their ball is in a red penalty area, for **one penalty stroke**, they may take relief outside that penalty area in three ways: stroke-and-distance, back-on-the-line, or lateral. (R17.1d)

☛ If a ball played from a penalty area comes to rest in the same penalty area, or another penalty area, or becomes lost, out of bounds, or unplayable outside the penalty area, see Rule 17.2.

☛ When a player's ball lies in a penalty area, there is normally no relief from abnormal course conditions, for an embedded ball, or for an unplayable ball. (R17.3)

28) **THE PLAYER'S BALL IS UNPLAYABLE** Except in a penalty area, if a player cannot or does not wish to play their ball as it lies, for **one penalty stroke**, they may take relief in three ways: stroke-and-distance, back-on-the-line, or lateral. (R19.2)

**Unplayable Ball in a Bunker** For **one penalty stroke**, a player may take stroke-and-distance relief outside the bunker, or if they choose back-on-the-line or lateral relief, they must drop a ball within the bunker. (R19.3a)

Or, for **two penalty strokes**, they may take relief outside the bunker by dropping a ball back-on-the-line. (R19.3b)

29) **THE PLAYER'S BALL IS LOST OR OUT OF BOUNDS** If a player's ball is lost outside a penalty area or is out of bounds, for **one penalty stroke**, they must either continue with their provisional ball or take stroke-and-distance relief. (R18)