



COLORADO GOLF ASSOCIATION

ON-COURSE REFEREE MANUAL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

GENERAL INFORMATION	3
Staff Communication.....	3
Categories of Referees	3
Uniforms and Equipment.....	3
The Radio.....	4
COURSE SET-UP	4
Setting and Checking Teeing Areas (Rule 6.2)	5
Checking All Areas of the Course	6
Checking Bunkers.....	6
Checking Hole Locations.....	6
BASIC OFFICIATING	8
Assignments.....	8
Spotting.....	8
Moving Around the Course and Approaching Players.....	8
Making a Ruling.....	9
Second Opinions and Second Ball Option (Stroke Play).....	10
Pace of Play.....	10
Suspension of Play.....	11
Resumption of Play.....	12
On Course Withdrawals.....	12
Junior Tournaments.....	13
Spectator Issues.....	13
COMMON RULES SITUATIONS	14
Rule 14 – Marking, Dropping & Placing.....	14
Rule 7 – Searching for the Ball	15
Rule 15.1 – Loose Impediments	16
Rule 15.2 – Moveable Obstructions	16
Rule 15.3 – Ball Marker Interfering with Play (On the Putting Green).....	17
Rule 15.3 – Ball Interfering with Play (Off the Putting Green)	17
Rule 16 – Abnormal Course Conditions	18
Rule 17 – Penalty Areas.....	19
Rule 18 – Out of Bounds and Provisional Ball.....	21
Rule 19 – Unplayable Ball	22



GENERAL INFORMATION

Staff Communication

Prior to the event you have signed up to work, CGA staff or the Rules Captain will communicate arrival times and assignments via e-mail. This may occur as soon as one week prior or as late as two days before. Thank you for your patience. If you need to cancel your referee-assignment, please do so through VolunteerHub or e-mail CGA staff or the Rules Captain ASAP.

Categories of Referees

Rules Referee: This general classification of on-course referees appointed by the Committee to decide questions of fact and apply the Rules.

Rules Captain: A referee who, by virtue of extensive learning and experience, has demonstrated outstanding ability in tournament administration and have an extensive knowledge of the Rules. At events they lead and coordinate the rules referees and work closely with the Tournament Director on matters involving on-course officiating and tournament administration. Rules Captains conduct ride along training to Apprentice volunteers.

Master Rules Referee: An honorary title given to an on-course referee who is no longer active, but who, over their career, has demonstrated an exceptional knowledge of the Rules and an exemplary dedication to the Association as a volunteer.

Match Referee: An on-course referee appointed by the Committee to accompany a specific match and to decide questions of fact and apply the Rules within that match.

Match Observer: An on-course referee appointed by the Committee to assist the Match Referee with questions of fact and to report any breach of the Rules to the Referee within that match.

Rover: An on-course referee assigned to assist and supervise on-course referees over a particular segment of the course.

Apprentice: A new volunteer that is working through the Apprentice training program and has not yet completed the certification requirements. Shadow Rules Captains during ride alongs at CGA events.

Scorer: Person assigned to the scoring area.

Starter: Person assigned to assist players with the start of their Round.

Tournament Director: CGA staff member in charge of the event.



Uniforms and Equipment

An on-course referee should carry cold weather/rain gear, a copy of the current Rules of Golf, a stopwatch or timer, a watch, and several tees. Please be certain to wear appropriate uniform apparel. This includes the CGA logoed light blue polo shirt, khaki bottoms, nametag, and CGA hat. If you've purchased CGA outerwear of any color, you may wear that as needed.

The well-equipped referee may also carry binoculars, a copy of the Referee Guide to the Rules of Golf, pencils, a 100-foot string, sunscreen, a rangefinder, extra scorecards, water bottle and snacks. Any items that contribute to your comfort or efficiency on long tournament days should be considered important. The CGA will provide an airhorn, radio, and paperwork for the day.

The Radio

All on-course referees are issued a radio when they check in. Turn the radio on, check that it is on the correct channel and broadcast a request for a radio check before going out on the course. When on-course, referees should have an ear piece connected to their radio.

The transmission quality of the radio is affected by wind, distance, and topography. If you are having trouble getting through, try moving to higher ground or shielding the mouthpiece with your hand. If you carry the radio on your belt, locate it so the transmit button is not activated when you sit in the golf cart. "Sitting on your radio" causes an unpleasant tone to sound continuously on every other radio and may result in you being called unflattering names by your fellow referees.

When initiating a transmission, make sure the transmit button is firmly pressed before you begin to speak. Identify yourself and the person or persons with whom you want to communicate. If you need assistance at your location, identify the situation with sufficient detail to allow someone to easily find you. When you finish speaking, make sure to release the transmit button.

Please confine your radio traffic to the business of conducting the tournament. There may be an open radio you don't know about in the pro shop, on the scoring table or near a group of players. An off-hand comment that might seem hilarious to you on the spur of the moment can prove embarrassing to you and the Association. Be careful to not initiate a transmission or respond to one if doing so might disturb a player.

If in doubt—use your radio! Your radio is your lifeline to a team of well-trained, cheerful people who are happy to assist you. Every on-course referee has made a bad ruling because they guessed at something, they were not sure of rather than risk embarrassment by asking for help. You will do that, too. Every one of your fellow referees has "gone blank" on a simple ruling and has needed help. They will understand when it happens to you. If you are not confident in how to proceed, call for help. Players will appreciate that getting their ruling right is most important.

COURSE SET-UP

On-course referees are generally assigned to check the course set-up. They are provided with a hole location sheet, as well as information regarding the length of the hole. The on-course referee will be checking and setting tee markers, checking hole locations, reviewing course markings, checking bunkers and rakes, and generally looking for potential problems on the course. If course set-up issues are found, notify the Rules captain or tournament director immediately. Following are recommended guidelines for performing these duties. Once set-up is complete, please notify the Rules captain and Tournament Director via radio.

Setting and Checking Teeing Areas (Rule 6.2)

Setting up a teeing area on any hole is an important part of championship administration. If setup improperly, players will notice it right away and unfortunately cannot adjust our mistake. Once you have put the tee markers down and someone has teed off from them, they are fixed for the rest of the competition, no matter what.

Tee markers should be placed 6-7 paces apart on par threes and 5-6 paces apart on par fours and par fives. If a tee pad is not wide enough to accommodate these parameters, get them as close as possible to the edges of the mow line. Do not worry about giving the player enough room to stand outside of the teeing area if there is not enough room to get the proper distance of paces in between the tee markers.

Be cognizant of any trees or obstacles immediately in the way of the selected teeing area. While getting tee markers centered on a tee pad is preferable, a clear line of play should always be the main concern.

Tee markers should be pointing down their respective sides of the fairways (left tee marker pointing down the left side of the fairway and right tee marker pointing down the right side of the fairway). Sometimes the angle of the fairway won't allow you to align it perfectly, but ideally the tee markers are pointed straight down to where the ideal tee shot would land. If there is ever a drivable par 4, always aim where a player would be aiming on an ideal safe play that is not going for the green. If a player chooses to do that then that is on them. On par 3s, the tee markers should point down the left and right edges of the green (NOT at the specific hole location). Before you leave, **stand at least 5 yards behind** the tee markers to make sure they look good. Your eye will catch if anything is awry. In any case, the hole is usually clearly designed with a recognizable landing zone/area for an ideal tee shot, which is where the tee markers should be aimed.

Tee markers should have at least two club-lengths (driver lengths) of prepared grass behind them so players have enough room. Tee markers should not have a sprinkler head or yardage marker in the middle of where the player will stand or tee their ball.

Ensure tee markers are on a good strip of grass that is not filled with divots. Tee markers should not have tall grass/bushes immediately in front of them, so a player has to be worried about



getting their ball off the ground quickly when hitting a tee shot. Tee markers should not be placed on ground where it is terribly sloped unless there is no better place to put them at the denoted yardages.

Tee markers do not need to be placed at the EXACT yardage listed if any of the above items make that exact spot an undesirable location. Please use good judgement when setting tee markers and know that there may be slight variances from the assigned yardage (off a few yards). The exact yardage number is not nearly as important as the above listed tips.

The Tournament Director may request that you dot tees. If this is the case, specific instructions will be given.

The Tournament Director may request that you remove course ("house") tees prior to placing Championship tees to reduce any confusion. These need to be bumped to the side of the teeing areas away from where the players may walk up to the tee.

Checking All Areas of the Course

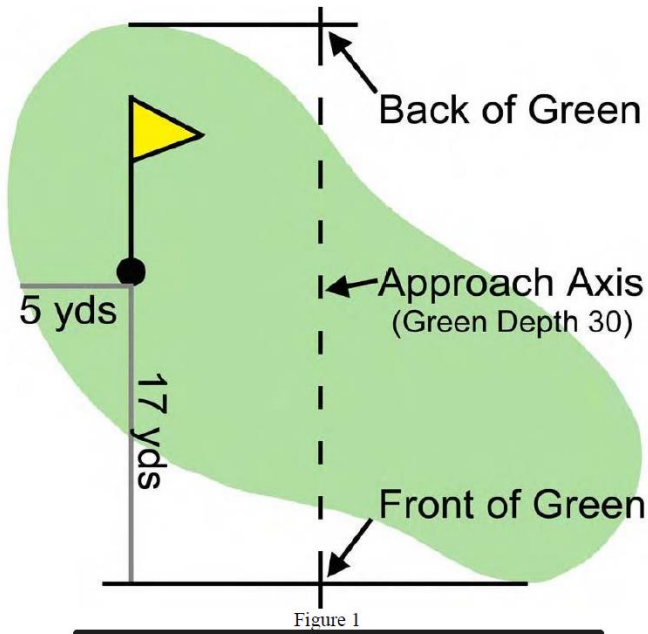
Moving toward the green, check that the penalty area markings are sufficiently clear and distinct to permit proper relief procedures. If there are any course drop zones identified that are not in use according to the event local rules, remove drop area signs and report to the Tournament Director. If drop areas are in use, ensure they are clearly identified. Look for any areas that you think should be marked ground under repair and report any such issues to the Rules Captain or Tournament Director.

Checking Bunkers

Bunkers should be free from depressions such as footprints, washouts, or animal tracks that might disadvantage a player. In these circumstances, feel free to rake the bunker. Report persistent problems to the Rules Captain. Remove any significant loose impediments, moveable obstructions from bunkers. Unless otherwise specified, all bunker rakes are to be removed and placed roughly parallel to the line of play outside the bunker and away from the fairway side. The head of the rake should be facing toward the hole, in a position that is least likely to affect the outcome of a shot while remaining accessible to players. Try to place a rake near the point where a player would most likely be entering a bunker.

Checking Hole Locations

Verify that the hole is cut as specified on the hole location sheet. The hole location sheet charts the location of the hole based on an imagined line drawn from where an approach shot will most likely be played through the center of the green (the approach axis). See diagram below.



When you confirm a hole location on the hole location sheet, you do not need to physically step off the paces on the putting green. If you see that a hole is supposed to be in the back left quadrant of the putting green, just make sure it is in the back left quadrant of the putting green. Your paces may not match up exactly to what is on the sheet and that's okay!

If you find a substantial variance between the hole location sheet and the hole as cut, first, make sure you are on the right green. Second, double check the hole location sheet, and third, determine whether the hole has been cut for that round. Remember, hole cutters do not always proceed in numerical sequence. If you cannot resolve the variance, notify the Tournament Director.



BASIC OFFICIATING

When arriving on site at the time provided by the Tournament Director, assemble your equipment, set up your cart, test your radio, review paperwork provided and address any questions or concerns with the Rules Captain or Tournament Director.

Assignments

Rules referees are frequently assigned to a specific hole or area of the course. Referees may also be assigned to specific groups or spotting for the starter at the direction of the Tournament Director. When assigned to an area, you should arrive in the area with enough time for an inspection. Consider not only the specific reasons for your assignment, but also other situations that could arise and rulings you might need to make. Review the Rules, Local Rules and Conditions of Competition which may be involved and, if possible, any applicable decisions. Try to clear up any questions or concerns you may have with the Rules Captain before the players reach your area.

Spotting

Referees are frequently assigned to assist the Starter or players by spotting balls in the vicinity of a landing area. Position yourself so you can best observe the flight of the ball and the result of the stroke considering any potential difficulty near the landing area. Try to avoid standing directly in the player's line of sight. If you are on a starting hole, coordinate your location and any signals you need to exchange with the Starter. In giving signals about the result of the stroke, e.g., when a ball may be out-of-bounds, only signal that the ball is out-of-bounds if you have actually seen the ball come to rest in a location that you know is out-of-bounds. Otherwise, signal that you are uncertain about the location of the ball and allow the player an opportunity to play a provisional ball. In some cases, it can be advantageous for the spotter and starter to be on their own radio channel during the starting wave as not to clog the main radio channel.

Moving Around the Course and Approaching Players

Be aware of your surroundings when moving around the course. Know if you are in a noisy gas or quieter electric cart. Placing the cart in reverse will create a loud sound. Look in all directions prior to moving to ensure you are not a distraction to anyone. Consider moving against the direction of play and avoid hovering with specific groups. Be conspicuously inconspicuous.

Your approach to a player, whether at the player's request or on your decision to intervene, should always be calm and professional. If you are wearing sunglasses, it helps to remove them so you can make eye contact with the player. When called to assist a player, an opening like "How can I help you?" sets a good foundation for why you are there and what you intend to do. If you have decided to intervene, an approach like, "Could we just hold everything here for a minute and make sure we are doing this right?" can serve to keep the player from proceeding past the point where a mistake can be corrected and signal that you are really trying to help.

Making a Ruling

The Rules Referee's role is always supportive, and we should ensure that our presence on the course is as unobtrusive as possible while still doing our job. Golfers are frequently able to handle relief situations under the Rules. An on-course referee should stand by, far enough away to be unobtrusive and close enough to respond to a request or prevent a mishap. Players may not need your assistance, and that's okay! If the player is proceeding incorrectly, the referee should intervene and suggest to the player the proper way to proceed. Try to get involved before a player does something that cannot be corrected; it may be necessary to ask a player to stop what they are doing and then talk about the procedure.

Keep the conversation to the task at hand. Keep it brief; this is not the time for a Rules seminar. Get the players back to the tournament as quickly as you can after you have the facts you need. Get a clear picture of all the facts before you start working on an applicable rule or decision. Sometimes, one additional fact will have you looking at the situation in a whole new light. It might even put you into a different Rule than you first thought was involved. Repeat back details to confirm that you have the correct facts. Ask all the necessary questions (who, what, when, where, why and how). Find out who knows anything about what occurred and talk to them. If all the fellow-competitors agree to all the relevant facts, it is probably not necessary to interview others. If there is disagreement as to relevant facts, see who else may have information, (fellow-competitors, spectators, caddies). Find out who you're talking to and what relationship they have with the player involved.

If there is a situation that requires additional facts, you can assist the Tournament Director by gathering information. Please check in with the Tournament Director first and keep them updated. Get all the facts as quickly as possible after an incident, the basic who, what, when, where and why. Remember people tend to rationalize their inappropriate behavior and the passage of time aids that tendency.

Don't ask questions that suggest the answer, like "Did you really intend to make a stroke at the ball or was that just a practice swing?" or "When you stepped on that boundary stake were you just trying to fairly take your stance or were you trying to impermissibly improve the area of your intended swing?"

If intent is relevant, ask the player, in the most neutral way possible, why they did what they did, e.g. "Why did you rub the green with your hand?", not "Did you intend to test the surface of the green by rubbing your hand on it?"

When discussing a player's options, give all the options, without emphasis on any particular option or any hint of recommendation on your part.

If penalty strokes are involved, never use "I" statements ("I'm issuing you a two-stroke penalty"). Rather, use a statement such as "the Rules require a two-stroke penalty for playing a wrong ball".



When relief has been properly taken, you should say to the player something like, “That ball is in play” to signal the end of the ruling. Move a short distance away while the player makes the next stroke.

When the ruling is done, ask “is there anything else I can help with?”, if not, move away from the group so they don’t feel they are being watched.

If you have made a ruling based on a little-known provision of the rules that results in an outcome that is unexpected by the players, you should remain nearby to answer any lingering questions.

Remember the radio is your lifeline, call for assistance if needed.

Second Opinions and Second Ball Option (Stroke Play)

Sometimes a player may ask, “Are you sure?” If you are absolutely sure, say so. In most cases you should also say that you would be happy to get a second opinion. If you are not absolutely sure, call for a second opinion or suggest that the player play a second ball in **stroke play (Rule 20.1c(3))**.

When the player asks for a second opinion, if help is not close by, outline the problem for the Rules captain on the radio. Remove the earpiece from your radio and let the player hear the answer. If you do this, let the captain know in advance that you are inviting someone else in on the conversation.

The suggestion that a player play a second ball is a powerful officiating tool, particularly if the situation is unusual or may involve equity. It allows the player to get back to playing and allows the rules referee time to arrive at a correct ruling. Remember to remind the player of the correct procedure under **Rule 20.1c(3)**.

A second ball is not allowed in **match play**. The referee can tell a player what the Rules provide, allow them to proceed as they see fit and ask the opponent whether they wish to request a ruling based on the player’s choice. If no request is made, the matter is settled. If a request is made, there is time to sort it out.

Pace of Play

One of the most frequent things that referees monitor and assist with is pace of play. Know the pace of play guidelines for that event. Policies vary by event (timing policy, group checkpoint policy). Most often (not always), the timing policy is used. Groups are allotted a specific amount of time to complete the paly of 18 holes in accordance with the pace of play matrix (“raguzzi”) (provided by the Tournament Director) When the timing policy is used, follow these tips.

Throughout the round it is a helpful practice to record when a group finishes a hole (flagstick time) on the raguzzi in the event that group timing may take place. If you notice a pace of play issue, make a statement over the radio. The more information that is shared, the better.



Rules referees should not approach groups without first talking to the Rules captain and/or Tournament Director. There are many considerations to review, prior to speaking to groups (group has bad hole, group waited on the tee, there is a three group wait on the next par 3, etc.). Moving in the opposite direction of play, will give you the best insight into gaps.

Before approaching players, ensure that they are BOTH behind their assigned time AND out of position. Simply having a gap in front of a group does not necessarily mean a group is out of position. "Out of Position" is defined in the pace of play policy.

First contact is a "friendly request" to try to catch up. Second contact is a "friendly warning" to catch up. Third contact is often a warning that the group "is subject to timing". Timing is typically reserved for rovers / captains. They will handle any further action.

Referees may be helpful to the group by acting as a forecaddie / spotter and helping with locating balls and other tasks that may help the group to play faster.

Alert following groups that pace may increase and avoid simply relocating the problem.

If a group is making progress, thank them for their efforts.

Suspension of Play

The Tournament Director is in contact with a weather service during the event and will make announcements over the radio to keep all informed and will provide a countdown when necessary to blow the airhorn for suspension. Do not blow the horn unless you hear the countdown. If you are near players when you hear on the radio that a suspension of play is imminent, you should attempt to warn them, so they are not surprised by the horn in the middle of a stroke. When suspension is under consideration, it is important for on-course referees to stay off the radio except in emergencies.

When the Committee has suspended play, players are entitled to mark and lift their ball. It can be helpful for you to note the locations of the markings to aid in proper resumption of play. If play is suspended for a dangerous condition, the most important task is to evacuate the players and caddies from the course. After that, it is appropriate to assist members of the public such as spectators.

There are two different types of suspension (immediate and normal). When play is suspended for a dangerous situation (lightning), play must stop immediately (immediate suspension = one prolonged blast of the airhorn). No additional strokes can be made. When play is suspended otherwise (darkness, unplayable course conditions, etc.), players may have options as to when they must stop (normal suspension = three short consecutive blasts of the airhorn). If players in the same group are choosing different options, inform the Tournament Director. Review Rule 5.7 for specific information.



In an immediate suspension, know where to evacuate players. If there is an evacuation plan in your packet, reference the proper location. If not, the Tournament Director will let you know where to send players. This is oftentimes determined by the estimated length of delay or availability of safe, grounded structures.

Resumption of Play

The Tournament Director will notify everyone on the details regarding the resumption. It is helpful to take back out the players you brought in if applicable and be in the same area of the course you were for the suspension to make sure that all players are back on the course. Notify over the radio if you notice anyone missing or if your area is back and ready to play.

When there is a suspension for a dangerous situation, most players will be in the middle of the hole and will have marked their ball with a tee or a ball marker. When resuming play in this situation, players will need to replace either their original ball or another ball back on the spot in which they had marked it. Players may replace their ball but may not make a stroke to resume play until the airhorn has sounded to resume play, detailed below. If a player comes back out (either later that day or the next day) and their ball marker is missing or gone, the player will do their best to estimate the spot and then will replace either their original ball or another ball back on that estimated spot.

The airhorn signal to resume will be two short horn blasts and there will be a countdown over the radio about when to sound the horn together as a team. It is important to spread out and have good coverage on the golf course to make sure that all players may hear the horn (two short horn blasts) for the restart. The tournament director will have a plan on where to go based on how many players are on the course, the topography of the course and the number of referees and staff available.

On Course Withdrawals

If during play you come across a competitor that wishes to withdraw, notify the Rules captain and Tournament Director over the radio; there are a few items that need to be completed before they leave the course. There are many reasons why a player may withdraw, it is helpful for the referee to note the player's name, tee time, who they were marking for, and reason for withdrawal for the Tournament Director. Most importantly the withdrawing player should certify scores for those holes where they were the marker. Ensure each remaining player has a marker and knows who is marking for who before leaving the group. If the withdrawing player was in a twosome, notify the Rules captain and Tournament Director who will give further guidance. If traditional scorecards are being used, collect the WD scorecard and relay to the Tournament Director. If the original marker is still using it to keep track of their own scores in the marker strip, it is ok for them to hand it in at scoring. Referees can transport withdrawing players in off the course.

If electronic scoring is being used, notify the Tournament Director and they will make the appropriate changes with the tournament software. In any case, the marker needs to certify the scores they had kept along with the player's whose scores they are.

Spectator Issues

Spectators are welcome at events; policies may differ between adult and junior competitions. While on the course if you encounter a potential issue relay with the Rules captain or Tournament Director on course of action. In general, spectators should remain on the cart paths or in the rough, or at least 20 yards away from players during the play of a hole, they for no reason should be on a putting green. Communication between players and spectators that could be deemed as advice of any nature is not allowed during a round (rule 10.2). If applicable to the event, spectators are not permitted to ride in a player's cart, as this privilege is reserved for caddies or another player in the group. For medical reasons, the Tournament Director may authorize the use of a spectator cart, they must remain on the cart paths or rough if no paths are available.

COMMON RULES SITUATIONS

Rule 14 – Marking, Dropping & Placing

Rule 14.1 – Marking

Whenever a player lifts their ball on a putting green, the ball must be marked. A player must use an artificial object as a ball marker (tee, coin, etc.). The player may not use a loose impediment to mark their ball. If a player is taking relief from a cart path or other abnormal course condition, it is not required that the player mark the ball. It is good practice to mark the original spot just to have clear frame of reference where the ball originally lay when trying to determine the nearest point of complete relief from an abnormal course condition.

A player may also set the toe of their club down behind their ball to mark it's spot on the putting green as well.

Rule 14.1 – Lifting

Lifting a ball is defined as “picking up the ball by hand, rotating it or otherwise deliberately causing it to move from its spot.” Anytime a player puts a hand on their ball on the putting green (even to simply rotate the ball to align the trademark), they must mark the ball as outlined above.

Rule 14.2 – Placing and Replacing

If a ball at rest is moved, the ball must be replaced by the player or the person that moved the ball. When replacing the ball, the ball must be let go of by hand and stay at rest on the determined spot, wherever that may be. If a player lets go of a ball to be replaced and it immediately moves (does not come to rest), the ball was not replaced correctly. If that placed ball does not stay at rest, the player must try a second time. If the ball then does not stay on that spot, the player must try and place a ball at the nearest spot where the original ball was placed but no closer to the hole and in the same area of the course. The only exception to this is if the ball will not stay at rest on the putting green. In this case, the nearest point where the ball may be placed and at rest may be in the general area.

When replacing a ball on an exact spot (i.e. putting green), the original ball must be used.

When a player is placing or replacing a ball, be sure to see the ball come to rest on a spot. Usually if a ball stays on the same spot without moving for a few seconds, it is at rest and you should acknowledge this fact to the player telling them that their ball is at rest. If the ball is at rest and then moves, Rule 9 is in now effect.

Rule 14.3 – Dropping

A player must drop a ball in the “right way”, which means all three of these things must be true:

- a. The player must drop the ball.
- b. The ball must be dropped from knee height without it being spun or tossed and without hitting the player or the player's equipment before it hits the ground.
- c. The ball must be dropped in the relief area.

If a player drops a ball in a wrong way listed above (i.e. shoulder height), the player may correct the mistake before the ball is played. When the ball is dropped in the “right way” as listed above, if the ball lands and comes to rest in the relief area, the ball is in play.

When a player is dropping ball under Rule 14.3b, they may always either clean their original ball or substitute the ball before dropping it. When the dropped ball has landed and comes to rest within the established relief area, their ball is now in play. Normally, an referee should immediately tell the player that the ball is in play so the player does not pick it up for some reason.

If the player’s ball is dropped in the “right way” within the relief area and then rolls out of the relief area, the player must drop a ball again in the “right way” and within the relief area. If the ball again rolls out of the relief area, the player must place a ball on the spot where the dropped ball landed on the second drop. If that placed ball does not stay at rest, the player must try a second time. If the ball then does not stay on that spot, the player must try and place a ball at the nearest spot where the original ball was placed but no closer to the hole and in the same area of the course. During this whole procedure, the player may always substitute a different ball when having to re-drop, place or replace. The only exception to this is if the ball will not stay at rest on the putting green.

Rule 14.5 – “Eraser Rule”

As mentioned above, if the player drops a ball in the wrong way (i.e. shoulder height), but in the right relief area, the player may correct this mistake before playing the ball. As an referee, if you ever see a player proceed incorrectly like this, please try to alert the player that they need to redrop the ball correctly.

This is all based on that this is corrected before the stroke is made.

Rule 7 – Searching for the Ball

The time allowed for a ball search is three minutes. This time starts when the player or their caddie begins searching for the ball in the area it is estimated to be lost in. There are occasionally places on the course where a player may not want to find their original ball. If a player has a provisional ball in the fairway and the natural result of your finding their ball is that they abandon that provisional ball and return to the tee under stroke and distance for a ball unplayable, you are well advised to wait near the area where the original ball is likely to be and take the player’s lead in whether to search. If you are not sure that a player wants to find their ball, it is advised that you wait to start searching until it is clear they will also be searching for the ball.

If you see players or a group of players searching for a ball already, please always go and help with the search.

If you come upon a search already in progress, ask if someone is timing the search. If not, start your own timer and ask the player whose ball is the subject of the search, how long the search has been going on before you arrived. Take the player’s word for it unless someone objects. If someone other than the player responds, ask the player if there is agreement with that person. Getting the

player's agreement will soften the blow for them when the ball is found ten seconds after the time for the search has elapsed.

As the search is coming closer to the three-minute mark, it can be helpful to provide information about the time that has elapsed. When there is one minute left, it can be helpful to declare that there is one minute available in the search. As the search is about to expire it is helpful again to remind the player that 10 seconds remain. When the three minutes is up, announce the fact and state, "the ball is now lost".

When the ball is located in rough terrain by someone other than the player, the player often asks the question "Can I play it?" which may be construed as a request for advice. Be alert and try to turn the conversation away from a possible Rule 10 violation.

Rule 15.1 – Loose Impediments

Loose impediments may be reasonably removed anywhere from on or off the golf course. If a loose impediment is removed and the ball moves when it lies in the general area, a bunker or penalty area, the player must replace the ball and will be penalized one stroke. If the ball was in the teeing area or on the putting green, the player will not be penalized (but must replace the ball if it was on the putting green).

Loose impediments are natural objects, nothing manmade can be considered a loose impediment. Sand or loose soil are not loose impediments but may be removed from the putting green without penalty.

As an referee, always notify the player to be careful around their ball when trying to remove a loose impediment in a situation that could cause the ball to move. It is always best for them to let it be rather than potential get themselves penalized.

Rule 15.2 – Movable Obstructions

Any movable obstruction may be moved. When the ball is at rest near a movable obstruction, you should recommend that the player mark the ball in case it moves during the moving of the obstruction. If the ball moves, it must be replaced on its original spot.

Obstructions are artificial objects on the golf course. They are either movable obstructions or immovable obstructions based on if they can be readily moved without damaging the obstruction itself or the golf course. Immovable Obstructions are detailed in the abnormal course condition section.

Please note that boundary objects or integral objects are never obstructions of any kind. A player may never move or get relief from an object that is identified as a boundary object or integral object.

A player may always remove a movable obstruction and if it moves a player's ball at rest, there is no penalty and the ball must be replaced. This is true no matter where the ball lies on the course. If the removal of the movable obstruction causes the ball to move, have them replace the ball back on its original spot. Referees need to walk through this procedure even if it is obvious that the player's ball is not going to stay at rest on that original spot. If the ball will not stay at rest on that spot, the player will need to try and replace it again on the original spot. If the ball does not stay at rest after the second attempt to replace, you will have the player try and replace the ball on the spot that is nearest to the original spot that is not closer to the hole and in the same area of the course. The only exception to this is if the ball will not stay at rest on the putting green. In this case, the nearest point where the ball may be placed and at rest may be in the general area.

Rule 15.3 – Ball Marker Interfering with Play (On the Putting Green)

If a player's ball marker is interfering with another player's upcoming line of putt, the player may move their ball marker one or two clubhead-lengths to the side that would best avoid interference. In this case, the player may do this on their own accord or if requested by another player. The player should start measuring with the bottom of their clubhead starting from their original spot of the ball marker towards an object that can easily be lined up towards. It is important to remember that the player move their ball marker back to the original spot once the other player has hit their putt.

Rule 15.3 – Ball Interfering with Play (Off the Putting Green)

Sometimes two balls in play will be close enough to interfere with each other and are both off the putting green. When this happens, a player may request that another player mark and move their golf ball that is interfering with play. Note that (when off the putting green) a player may only mark and move their ball interfering with play if requested by another player. Rule 15.3b only allows a ball that is off the putting green to be marked and moved for interference if requested by another player. The player who is moving their ball will first mark the spot of the ball with a ball marker and then pick up the ball to move it out of the way. It is important to tell the player who is moving the ball prior to them picking it up that they may not clean the ball when doing this procedure. The best way for a player to do this is to "pinch" the ball with two fingers to ensure that they are not palming the ball to potentially clean it. After "pinching" the ball to pick it up, they should either continue holding it in this manner or set it off to the side and on the ground.

If the balls were close enough to each other that the player's ball marker is still interfering with play, the player may then move that ball marker to the side by measuring with a club length in a direction that will avoid interference when the ball marker is set back down. Once the other player has made their stroke, the player must remeasure with the club length to get back to the original spot of the ball and then replace the ball back on that original spot.



Rule 16 - Abnormal Course Conditions

Abnormal course conditions are identified as ground under repair, animal holes, immovable obstructions, and temporary water.

If a player has interference from an abnormal course condition on the golf course, a player is entitled to free relief as long as the ball does not lie in a penalty area. If a player takes relief in this way, they may always clean their original ball or even substitute another ball before taking relief. They will need to establish their nearest point of complete relief and drop a ball within one club length of that spot and no closer to the hole. The ball must land and come to rest in the same area of the course as where the ball currently lies.

There is "line of play" relief for an immovable obstruction when the local rule for immovable obstructions near the putting green is in effect, which it is for all CGA and USGA events. This local rule allows a player to drop a ball within one club length of the nearest point of complete relief when a sprinkler head lies within two club lengths of the putting green, their ball lies within two club lengths of that sprinkler head, the sprinkler head is on their line of play and when both the sprinkler head and the ball are in an area that is cut to fairway height or less.

The only other time "line of play" relief is available is when an abnormal course condition is on the line of play for a ball that lies on the putting green (this is extremely rare) or if there is a temporary immovable obstruction (also very rare).

Ground Under Repair

When asked to determine whether an area that has not been marked as Ground Under Repair should be declared as such, if the answer is apparent (i.e. a bad tire rut in the fairway), go ahead and make the ruling. If there is any doubt about whether relief should be granted or whether you have the authority, call for the Rules captain or Tournament Director on the radio to help make a ruling. If the captain is not readily available, suggest that the player play a second ball under 20.1c(3) (stroke play). If the player plays a second ball, clearly mark the location of the original ball and ask the captain to review the situation.

Temporary Water

For a ball to be in temporary water, the water must be visible at either the spot of the ball (lie/area of intended swing) or when a player takes a stance. When looking if there is interference with their stance, the water must be seen before or after the player takes their stance and without pressing down excessively with their feet. In determining the nearest point of complete relief for interference by temporary water, the player should simulate their stance in various locations of graduated distances from the original location of their stance. On-course referees should not try various locations since shoe size and weight are likely to differ from that of the player. When the nearest point of relief has been determined and the ball dropped, check to make sure that complete relief has been taken.

Immovable Obstructions

When there is interference from an immovable obstruction, you should suggest that the player leave the ball where it lies while they consider the likely result of taking relief. It may be that after examining the options, the player may elect to play the ball as it lies.

Embedded Ball

When a ball is embedded in the general area (regardless of grass height) the player is entitled to relief as long as there is not interference by anything other than the ball being embedded makes the stroke clearly unreasonable (for example, when a player is unable to make a stroke because of where the ball lies in a bush). The player's reference point is the spot directly behind their ball and from there, the relief area is one club length in the general area and no closer to the hole. If a player's ball is embedded in the rough but their one club length measurement gets them to a better area (fairway), that is the player's good fortune. The player may clean and drop the original ball or may drop another ball when taking relief.

Rule 17 - Penalty Areas

Penalty Areas are either defined as yellow or red, but for the most part will be defined as red. Players are entitled to play the ball as it lies unless the penalty area is defined as a no play zone. If a player decides to take relief, their relief options depend on if their ball lies in a yellow or red penalty area. There is no difference between playing a ball from within a penalty area and playing a ball from the general area. So a player may ground their club, remove loose impediments and take practice swings as long as no other Rules are breached in this process. Remember when the ball is in a penalty area, the Rules do not allow relief from abnormal course conditions, immovable obstructions, or the option to take an unplayable ball.

If a ball is known or virtually certain to be in a penalty area, a provisional ball is not allowed. The player must proceed under any of the applicable Rules for a ball known or virtually certain to be in a penalty area.

If you know where the player's ball crossed the edge of the penalty area, mark the spot with a tee or other object. If not, just note as much information as you can relative to the flight of the ball in relation to the edge of the penalty area and wait for the player. There is no need for a ruling unless there is some dispute over the point selected by the player or unless you are convinced that the player is clearly proceeding incorrectly. In determining the point where the ball last crossed the edge, the player should get the benefit of the doubt. But, in determining whether it is known or virtually certain that the ball is in the penalty area, doubt is resolved against the player. Often, all the fellow-competitors in a group will agree that a ball is in a penalty area even though the standard of "known or virtually certain" has clearly not been met. In this case, it is proper that your ruling go against the popular opinion.

Stroke and Distance Relief – Option #1

The player may use the stroke and distance option when taking relief from a yellow or red penalty area. The player will play a ball under the requirements of Rule 14.6 depending on what area of the course the last stroke was played from.

Back on the line Relief – Option #2

The player may use the back on a line relief option when taking relief from a yellow or red penalty area.

Use the flagstick and current location of the ball to establish a line between those two points and drop a ball on that line with no limit to how far back it may go. The relief area for back on the line relief is a one club length circle in all directions from the reference point on the line. With this relief option, the player's drop may go forward of the reference point, as long as it stays within the relief area.

Lateral Relief (Red Penalty Area Only)– Option #3

If a player's ball last crosses the edge of a red penalty area, the player may take lateral relief based on the spot where the ball last crossed into the red penalty area. The player may drop a ball within two club lengths of where the ball last crossed into the penalty area. The ball must land and come to rest within this established relief area. It is advised that players use a tee to establish where the ball last crossed into the penalty area as well as use their driver to measure the two club lengths and then use a tee to establish the edge of their relief area.



Rule 18 – Out of Bounds and Provisional Ball

Out of Bounds

If a player's ball is out of bounds, they must either proceed under stroke and distance or use their provisional ball, if they had played one.

A player's ball is out of bounds when all of it lies out of bounds. If you need to use string to determine if a player's ball is in bounds, put each end of the string at base level on the golf course side on whatever the boundary object is in this situation. If one dimple of the golf ball is on the golf course, that ball is in bounds. Players may stand out of bounds to play a stroke at a ball in bounds, but do not get relief from any boundary object or immovable obstruction that are out of bounds.

Provisional Ball

If a player's ball may be out of bounds or lost outside of a penalty area, it is always encouraged that the player announces and plays a provisional ball. This procedure is in place to help save time, so it is highly encouraged that players take advantage of it when necessary.

If it is known or virtually certain that the only place a ball could be lost is inside a penalty area, a provisional ball is not allowed in this situation.

If the player intends to play a provisional ball, they need to announce that they are playing a provisional ball by literally saying the words "provisional ball". That is best practice but if they were to say "I'm playing another ball just in case", that would also satisfy the requirements of this Rule. The player then needs to play a provisional ball under the requirements of 14.6, depending on which area of the course the last stroke was made from.

If the original ball becomes lost outside a penalty area or is out of bounds, the provisional ball becomes the ball in play under penalty of stroke and distance.

If the original ball is not lost outside a penalty area or not out of bounds, then the provisional ball is a wrong ball and must not be played under any circumstances.

If it is known or virtually certain the original ball is lost inside of a penalty area, the player must not use their provisional ball under any circumstances. The player must use Rule 17 at this point and abandon the provisional ball.

Rule 19 - Unplayable Ball

The player is the only one that may be declared unplayable. This may be done anywhere on the course, except in a penalty area. For one penalty stroke, the player will have the following options.

1. Stroke and Distance - Take a stroke and distance penalty and play the ball from where it was last played under the stroke and distance provisions above.
2. Back on a line Relief - Use the flagstick and current location of the ball to establish a line between those two points and drop a ball on that line with no limit to how far back it may go.
3. Lateral Relief - Drop a ball within two club lengths of the current spot of the ball, and no closer to the hole.

A ball may also be declared unplayable in a bunker using the three options listed above, plus a new option established in 2019. For the three listed above, if options #2 and #3 are used, the ball must be dropped within that same bunker under those Rules with a one stroke penalty. In 2019, a new Rule will allow players to drop a ball outside of the bunker using the principles of option #2, but this will cost the player 2 penalty strokes.

If a player takes unplayable relief, this does not guarantee that their ball will be in a good position. If the ball is dropped in the right way and comes to rest in the relief areas outlined above, the ball is once again in play and this is a new situation. If a player needs to take unplayable ball relief again, they may choose to do so.