



ON-COURSE RULES OFFICIAL GUIDE

(updated 1/1/2020)

Uniforms and Equipment

An on-course official should carry cold weather/rain gear, a copy of the Rules of Golf, a stopwatch or timer, a watch, and several tees. Please be certain to wear appropriate uniform apparel with a CGA logo.

The well-equipped official may also carry binoculars, a copy of the Official Guide to the Rules of Golf, pencils, a 100-foot string, sunscreen, a rangefinder, water bottle and snacks. Any items that contribute to your comfort or efficiency on long tournament days should be considered important.

The Radio

All on-course officials 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.

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 officials.

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.

Your radio is your lifeline to a team of well-trained, cheerful people who are happy to assist you. Every on-course official has made a bad ruling because she guessed at something she was not sure of rather than risk embarrassment by asking for help. You will do that, too. Every one of your fellow officials 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.

Basic Officiating



An on-course official assists the Committee in the administration of a tournament. OCO's assist players in using the Rules of Golf, including occasional interventions to prevent a breach of the Rules.

Our 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 official should stand by, far enough away to be unobtrusive and close enough to respond to a request or prevent a mishap. If the player is proceeding incorrectly, the official 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 she is doing and then talk about the procedure.

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.

Keep the conversation to the task at hand. Keep it brief; this is not the time for a Rules seminar. 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.

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

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)**.

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 official 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 official can tell a player what the Rules provide, allow her to proceed as she sees fit and ask the opponent whether she wishes 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.

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.

Penalty Areas

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 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.

Remember when the ball is in a penalty area, the Rules do not allow relief from Abnormal Ground Conditions, Immovable Obstructions, or Unplayable Lies.

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, 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 on the radio to help make a ruling. If the Captain is not readily available, suggest that the player play a second ball (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.

When dealing with a difference of opinion over where the ball last crossed the edge of the GUR or whether the ball is lost in GUR, gather as much information as you can, make a decision and move on. In determining the point where the ball last crossed the edge of the GUR, the player should get the benefit of the doubt. But in determining whether it is known or virtually that a ball is lost in GUR, doubt is resolved against the player.



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Temporary Water

For a ball to be in temporary water, the water must be visible when a player takes a stance and relates only to the area of the stance. In determining the nearest point of relief for interference by temporary water, the player should simulate her stance in various locations of graduated distances from the original location of her stance. On-course officials 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.

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.

Immovable Obstructions

When there is interference from an immovable obstruction, you should suggest that the player leave the ball where it lies while she considers 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. The nearest point of relief may be in a bush or tree, in which case the player may need to estimate the point in measuring her one club-length for a relief area. There is no relief for that part of the obstruction that is out-of-bounds or in a penalty area.

Ball Unplayable

When assisting a player with relief under Rule 19, you should remind the player that if a dropped ball returns to its original location or another location where it is unplayable, the player is **NOT** entitled to a re-drop without penalty.

Searching

There are occasionally places on the course where a player may not want to find her original ball. If a player has a provisional ball in the fairway and the natural result of your finding her ball is that she abandons that provisional ball and returns 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 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 her when the ball is found ten seconds after the time for the search has elapsed.

During the search, it is not helpful to provide information about the time that has elapsed, except in response to a question. Allow the player to decide when to terminate the search without comment



until the three minutes have elapsed. When the three minutes is up, announce the fact and state, “the ball is now lost by definition”.

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.

Suspension of Play

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 officials 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.

Checking the Course Set-Up

On-course officials 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 official 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. Following are recommended guidelines for performing these duties.

Teeing Area

The tee markers should be placed perpendicular to the line of play, and as a general rule five to six paces apart on par four and five holes, and six to eight paces apart on par three holes.

There should be room to stand on either side of the teeing ground and play a ball teed at the outer limits of the teeing ground on that side. There should be at least a two club-length depth of mowed teeing ground directly behind each tee marker. There should be no limbs, branches or other impediments that would interfere with any swing made at a ball teed anywhere in the teeing ground.

If any other tee markers on the course are situated as to create a possibility of confusing players, those tee markers should be set aside.

Before leaving the teeing area, look down the length of the hole to see if penalty area markings, particularly any transitions from yellow to red penalty areas, and any out-of-bounds markings, are visible from the teeing area.



General Area and Penalty Areas

Moving toward the green, check that the penalty area markings are sufficiently clear and distinct to permit proper relief procedures. Look for any areas that you think should be marked ground under repair and report any such issues to the Rules Captain. If there is an out-of-bounds area, ensure that you can sight along the out-of-bounds stakes to see if a ball is out-of-bounds. Add or relocate the stakes as necessary to provide line of sight with an optimum distance of no more than 30 paces between stakes.

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 from bunkers. Unless otherwise specified, all bunker rakes are to be removed and placed roughly parallel to the line of play. 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.

The Green

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).

Because the measurement for hole placement is checked by pacing it off, there may be some variance and should not be cause for concern. A variance of three paces may not be material if the landing area of the green is clearly visible to the player on approach. 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. Look over the entire green for abnormal course conditions and potential issues that may affect playability.

Remember that other than the Superintendent's personnel, you are likely to be the first person on the green that day. Always step lightly, wear less aggressive footwear and don't take any more steps on the green than necessary to do your job.

Preparing for a Hole Assignment

Rules officials are frequently assigned to a specific hole or area of the course. 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 tournament reaches your area.



The Rover

An on-course official may be assigned to rove and have responsibilities for a particular area of the course, typically either the front nine or the back nine. The Rover is typically the Rules Captain, and her role is both technical and administrative. She is the first line of assistance on rulings for on-course officials. She monitors potential pace of play problems and if a group is put “on the clock” she may be responsible for timing the group.

Unless specifically requested to assist an on-course official with a ruling, a Rover should observe the ruling and only get involved if necessary to ensure a correct procedure. The Rover is responsible for monitoring on-course officials and relieving them as necessary for meals and breaks in extreme weather.