

Birchbank Rules Session – 2023

IMPORTANT RULE CHANGES FOR 2023

Back-on-the-line drops – An option for Unplayable Ball and Penalty Area relief. Must drop on the line, note where ball first touches the ground, and your relief area is 1 club-length in every direction including forward.

Damaged clubs – For clubs not damaged by abuse, besides continuing to use or repair damaged clubs, you **may also replace** them.

Wrongly substitute a ball – penalty was 2 strokes and now is 1 stroke.

Handicap is now a committee responsibility – unless Committee makes it a local rule

On a putting green, if putt strikes a worm or other animals such as insects which are also loose impediments, play it as it lies, don't replay the stroke.

Breaking several rules – if you break a rule (such as picking up your ball without marking it – a one stroke penalty) and then playing it from a wrong place – a 2 stroke penalty), you would just get the higher penalty – so 1 stroke + 2 strokes = 2 strokes. But if there was an intervening event such as someone telling you that you couldn't pick up your ball without marking it and then you put it in the wrong place and putted it, you would get 1 stroke for picking up the ball and 2 strokes for playing from wrong place – 1+2= 3 strokes.

Rule 25: for players with disabilities – no longer covered under model local rules (Blind or Physical or Mental Disabilities)

Generally, play the ball as it lies and the course as you find it.

Practice – Prior to tournaments, only practice strokes or rolling the ball on a green allowed in designated practice areas such as driving range, putting & chipping areas. Also allowed to practice putt or chip on or near your first Teeing area. Practice infraction is: first offence is 2 strokes applied to 1st hole, second offence is DQ.

Out of Bounds or lost – **only** choice is Stroke & Distance. If it's doubtful, play a Provisional Ball. Clearly announce it as being a Provisional ball.

You **should** always put an identifying mark on your ball and mark a provisional differently.

Searching – have 3 minutes from when you reach the search area. Somebody check the time! If you move the ball while searching, no penalty, replace it. Mark it before you lift to identify it and if it accidentally moves, no penalty and replace it.

Accidentally causing your ball to move – on the putting green, replace it, no penalty. Anywhere else on the Course, replace it but it's a one stroke penalty.

Sand & Dirt are not loose impediments. Can be removed on green – not anywhere else UNLESS they land on your ball after it is at rest. You are always entitled to the lie you had.

Ready golf is encouraged! Use common sense. [We discussed various ideas to keep up pace of play]

Starting or Stopping Play: Be ready to start about 10 min. before your time.

Shotgun start: Don't start before the horn – 2 stroke penalty. Up to 5 minutes after start time – 2 strokes, after 5 minutes DQ.

Stopping play: one long horn means immediate stop for imminent danger – seek shelter, may mark and pick up or leave ball. Three horns (darkness or course unplayable) mean stop play if between holes or you may finish hole that your group has started – individual choice, but if you play you need a marker. Penalty – DQ. Two horns signals resumption of play after a suspension (if the same day)

Advice – Don't give it or ask for it – 2 stroke penalty. Information on rules is not advice. Distance measuring devices are allowed, and information may be shared.

Moving Ball – hits any person or outside influence – play it as it lies – no penalty. On the green, if it hits anyone other than player, person holding flagstick (see p.95) – replay the stroke, no penalty.

Substituting a Ball – allowed when proceeding under a rule involving dropping – Not when replacing.

BUNKERS:

- **Free relief** from temporary water (puddles), immovable obstructions (drains), animal holes (moles or rabbits), no play zone in bunker. Find nearest point of relief plus one club-length no nearer the hole for relief. (If you don't like that option, for 1 penalty stroke you can use back-on-the-line relief outside the bunker for 1 penalty stroke.)
 - can move movable obstructions (put ball back if it moves) – no penalty
 - can move loose impediments – if ball moves, replace it – 1 penalty stroke
- **Penalty relief for unplayable in bunker:**
If you don't like the free relief option: Choices for 1 penalty stroke: stroke & distance, back-on-the-line, lateral 2 club-lengths but within the bunker
OR for 2 penalty strokes: back-on-the-line outside the bunker
- If you search for your ball in bunker, you may dig it out, then replace it, re-creating its lie. Leave a small bit of ball showing.
- Don't touch the sand in front or behind your ball or contact the sand in your backswing or in practice swings. Penalty is 2 strokes.
- If 2 balls are close to each other, ball further from hole is first to play. Other ball should be moved as on a putting green – except use a club-length, then re-create lie you had.

Rarely, if a bunker is under construction or completely flooded, it may be considered as GUR. This would be a temporary local rule by the Committee for particular bunkers.

UNPLAYABLE BALL: Only you can decide if your ball is unplayable and can be **anywhere** on the course **except** in a Penalty Area.

- **Options:** Stroke and Distance (don't need to find the ball), Back-on-the-Line, and lateral 2 club-lengths no nearer the hole (must locate ball to make the measure from the ball). All options cost one penalty stroke.

Club-length: longest club player has in bag not counting a long putter

NEAREST POINT OF RELIEF (NPR) & RELIEF AREA:

- Player chooses club she would use were the condition not there, stance, swing, and line of play if condition not there.
- Find the nearest point where the condition does not interfere. For instance, if you are taking relief from a cart path, your heels must not touch the cart path or you would be penalized 2 strokes or if from GUR if you drop your ball so it's out of GUR but your feet are in the GUR – 2 strokes.
- Swing the club you would have used and where it touches the ground is your NPR. Place your tee there. Then with your longest club, measure 1 club-length no nearer the hole. You may get a small wedge, a quarter of a circle, etc. as your relief area for dropping.
- If your ball rolls out of the relief area, or touches you before it touches the ground, re-drop. If it touches you after it touches the ground but stays in the relief area, it's in play.

PUTTING GREEN

- **Don't pull your ball out of the hole with your putter-head. Damages the hole.**
- Ball must be marked before lifting or touching. Marker must be a small object – not a blade of grass or a flower. Putter behind or beside is okay. Ball must be replaced by hand, letting go with fingers. Cannot be replaced by moving with a putter – 1 stroke. Marker must be removed before putting or 1 stroke.
- Allowed to touch the line of putt but don't improve it
- Any **accidental** movement of ball or ball marker, replace it with no penalty. If you accidentally step on it, kick it or hit with a practice putt, just replace with no penalty.
- Repairs on the green – reasonable actions without delaying play
Allowed Repairs – ball marks, shoe damage, scrapes, equipment or flagstick indentations, old hole plugs, turf plugs, scrapes from maintenance equipment, animal tracks or hoof indentations, embedded objects such as stones, acorns, hail
Not allowed – normal maintenance practices such as aeration holes, grooves from vertical mowing, rain and other natural forces, natural surface imperfections (bare spots, weeds), natural wear of the hole.
- **When to replace ball on putting green moved by natural forces (wind, water, gravity)**
– if ball has been **lifted and replaced** on green – must be replaced – if not 2 strokes
– **if not already lifted and replaced** on green – must be played from new spot – if not 2 strokes
- **Ball Resting Against Flagstick in hole** – if any part of ball is below the lip – ball considered holed
- Flagstick can be left in or taken out or tended.
- **Overhanging hole** – walk to hole & have 10 seconds for it to drop, then is considered at rest. If it then falls into hole, is considered holed but one penalty stroke is added.
- **Wrong green** – **must** take complete relief for ball, swing and stance – free
- Mark your score at the next tee.
- Can reach across to tap in putt – don't drag it in.
- Don't putt standing across or on the line behind your ball unless you are avoiding stepping on someone else's line.
- Don't allow partner or caddie to stand behind your line once you begin your stance or else back off and reset yourself.

PENALTY AREAS – Must be 95% certain that ball is in Penalty Area to take penalty relief. If you can't find your ball and there are other places it could possibly be, then it is a lost ball.

Cannot declare the ball unplayable in a penalty area.

Can be played as it lies. You are allowed to do anything which you are allowed to do in the **general area** (new term for “through the green”) such as move loose impediments but don't move the ball, can take practice swings contacting the ground or water, move movable obstructions but no relief from abnormal course conditions which are: immovable obstructions, temporary water, GUR.

- Yellow or Red? – if not marked, it is Red.
- Yellow – usually crosses the fairway. Choices for relief: back-on-the-line or stroke & distance
- Red – often parallel to fairway – Choices for relief: stroke & distance, back-on-the-line, lateral which is 2 club-lengths no nearer the hole
- **Key point – make your best estimate where your ball last crossed the penalty area.**
- Sometimes there are Drop Zones as an additional choice of relief.
- **If the Ball is in a No Play Zone in a penalty area – must take penalty relief.** If ball is in penalty area but stance is in the no play zone, can get free relief for stance in the penalty area