

## The Rules Applied – October '23

Have we talked yet about loose impediments and movable obstructions? Maybe we should say a few words.

*I just barely avoided the front bunker on 16, but my ball is resting against a rake. I can move the rake, right?* Yes. A rake is considered a “movable obstruction.” It’s an obstruction because it is an artificial (not natural) object, and it does not mark a boundary. (Same for a candy wrapper or cigarette butt.) Also, these items are not “integral”, that is, something the course or tournament committee has designated as part of the challenge of the course. And the rake is obviously movable because it can be moved with reasonable effort without damaging the course. (Yes, you could jackhammer a cart path, but that does not make it movable.) Under Rule 15.2, you may remove a movable obstruction with no penalty.

*But what if my ball moves when I move the rake?* Still no penalty. But you must replace your ball in its original spot before hitting. (Rule 15.2.) And if the ball will not stay on that spot after two tries, it must be placed in the nearest spot no closer to the hole. (Rule 14.2.)

*My buddy’s ball is in the same area, but instead of a rake, he’s managed to find some rocks and sand around his ball. Can he move those out of the way, like the rake?* Well, the answer here is no, yes and no. First, no, it’s not like the rake – the rake is a movable obstruction, but the rocks and sand are natural objects and therefore not obstructions. Rather, rocks are “loose impediments”, that is, natural objects which are not attached to the ground. Second, yes, under Rule 15.1, you may remove loose impediments anywhere on the course. But third, no, you cannot avoid a penalty if your ball moves. Rather, if removing a loose impediment causes your ball to move, you must replace the ball in its original spot and take a 1 stroke penalty. (There’s no penalty on the green or teeing area, but if you are off the green, . . . sorry.)

*What about removing the sand?* Unfortunately, the definition of loose impediment specifically excludes sand from the definition. So you may not remove sand from the area around your ball, and you may not clear sand out of your path to the green.

*Wait, are you telling me I’m supposed to putt through a sandy green?* No, that’s different. The rule relating to putting greens allows you to remove sand on the green without any penalty (Rule 13.1c), and that’s true whether your ball is on or off the green.

So rakes – remove, no worries; rocks – remove, but carefully; sand – don’t remove at all. Easy, right?

Some of us might remember this interesting ruling Tiger Woods received in 1999 – Fans helped him move a rather large loose impediment (rock) from in front of his ball with no penalty.

