

## The Rules Applied - January '23

For those of you who played in the January tournament, you probably received most of this information. For the rest, here is some info about what to do when you are affected by water.

*After the rain, it is really muddy on the course. Can I clean mud off my ball?* Generally, the rules do not allow you to clean your ball, other than when it is on the green (or, of course, between holes). However, in tournament play, the tournament officials may authorize the players to lift, clean and place the ball. If this is not authorized by the course or by tournament officials, it is not permitted regardless of the condition of the course. At BMGC tournaments, when conditions warrant it, we may authorize players to lift, clean and place the ball. When this is authorized, it applies everywhere on the course except penalty areas. Remember to mark your ball before you lift it. Then, we require that the ball must be placed within 6" of its original spot, no closer to the hole. If you play in non-BMGC tournaments, you should check with tournament officials as to their rules.

*What if my ball or stance is in temporary (casual) water. I get relief from this, right?* To be clear, this refers to actual water and not just mud. And it does not refer to balls in penalty areas. But temporary water is an abnormal course condition, like a cart path. You get free relief, by marking your nearest point of relief and then dropping within one club length (no closer to the hole).

*What if there is water in the bunker?* If you find your ball or stance in water in a bunker, you get free relief at the nearest point of relief within the bunker which is no nearer the hole. If there is no place in the bunker that provides complete relief, then you can take the maximum possible free relief (you may find a spot which is soggy, as that is better than completely submerged). But if there is no acceptable point of free relief, your only option would be to go straight back, away from the hole and drop outside the bunker, with a penalty of 1-stroke. (Rule 16-1c.) In BMGC tournaments, we have adopted a tournament rule allowing a free drop outside the bunker where there is no place to drop in the bunker. But that is our own local rule, not a general rule of golf.

*Lastly, what if there is water on the green?* If you find your ball or stance in water on the green, you get free relief at your nearest point of relief no closer to the hole (on or off the green). In addition, if you are on the green and there is casual water in your line (your intended path to the hole), you may take relief from this as well, at the nearest point which is no closer to the hole and which gives you an unobstructed line to the hole. Note that this line of sight rule only applies when your ball is on the green.

## The Rules Applied – February '23

For those of you thinking that we just have not talked enough about cart paths, you're in luck! In November, we talked about the right side of Hole 11, but there are a number of other odd circumstances at DeBell where cartpaths come into play.

*I'm on the left side of Hole 11, near the green. I know the cart path is out of bounds there, but my ball managed to stay on grass. Because I'm right handed, when I take my stance, I'm standing on the cart path. So I get relief right?*

Sorry, no. although you normally get relief when an immovable obstruction interferes with your stance or swing, this does not apply when the obstruction is out of bounds or in a hazard. So at that spot, no relief.

*Now, I'm on the left side of Hole 16 because my tee shot is up on the hillside. I know that my ball lies within a red-staked penalty area, so I can take penalty area relief (at a cost of 1 stroke) and drop within 2 club lengths. Right?*

Well, sort of. In this case, the red stakes are on the left side of the cart path, so the cart path is not a part of the penalty area. Technically, you should drop within 2 club lengths of the spot where your ball crossed into the hazard. But this will leave you on the cart path. You are then entitled to cart path relief, which would be the nearest point of relief off the cart path, plus one club length. So, you don't get 2 club lengths on the grass; you get nearest point plus 1 club length.

*Finally, what if my approach shot on 18 ends up hole high near the fence left of the cart path? I have to stand on the cart path to get a club on the ball, and my club would probably hit the cart path, so I get relief, right?*

Here, the answer depends on whether you believe in good faith that you could have hit the ball if not for the cart path. Remember, you do not get relief from the fence because it is a perimeter fence which marks out of bounds. If your ball is so tight against the fence that you cannot get a club on it, you'll have to take a penalty for an unplayable lie. But if in good faith you believe you would have hit the shot but for the cart path (you might have played it sideways, rather than take a penalty), then you get cart path relief. First mark your ball and, depending on where the flag is, walk across the cart path at an angle, maintaining the distance from the flag to determine where the nearest point of stance and swing relief is. If you have a range finder, you can use it to help you make sure you do not get any closer to the hole. You may find that you need ten steps to get to a point of relief if you angle to the right, but only nine steps if you angle to the left. (This may well be different depending on whether you are right or left handed.) Obviously, if you can get to a point of relief no nearer to the hole in a shorter distance to the left, than that is your nearest point of relief (even if you like the angle from the right better).

Any other cart path questions? Let us know.

## The Rules Applied – March '23

Seems like there's always something new that we have to deal with. For golfers, it's the 2023 revisions to the rules of golf. OK, these probably will not change the way you look at the world, but there were a few changes which could make your golf life a little easier.

Replacing a damaged club. *So I must have more power than I thought, because my driver shaft snapped on my tee shot on 8. I have an extra driver in my car. Can I replace the club?*

Under new Rule 4.1a, the answer is now yes. In fact, you may replace a damaged club with any other club. However, there are some conditions – first, the club must have been damaged during the round; second, you must not unreasonably delay play (so wait until you make the turn before going to your car); and third, the club must not have been damaged by abuse. So if your shaft broke as a result of you slamming it into the ground after an errant tee shot, then you're out of luck.

Ball moved by natural forces. *Even with a new driver, I still sliced my tee shot into the barranca on the 10<sup>th</sup> hole. I know this is a red-tipped penalty area, and so I took a proper drop. The ball lay still for awhile, but then a gust of wind blew it back into the barranca! Now what?*

When you take relief from a penalty area, your ball must come to rest in a relief area. If it rolls back into the penalty area, it is outside the relief area, and therefore you must redrop. However, in your case the ball did come to rest in a proper area and later rolled into the hazard. Ordinarily, you must play your ball as it lies – if your ball moves as a result of natural forces, there is no penalty, but you play from the new spot. (Rule 9.3). But this does not apply to a ball on the putting green that has been marked and then replaced, and, under the new Rule 9.3, it does not apply where a ball is put into play by dropping, placing or replacing it. For both the ball on the green which was marked and replaced, and the ball in the relief area which was dropped, the ball must be replaced in its original position before the wind blew it, and there is no penalty.

Back of the line relief. *On the 3<sup>rd</sup> hole, I hit into the barranca and want to take back of the line relief. Any special rules here?*

This one is pretty straightforward. Your relief is on the line going straight back from the hole to the point at which your ball entered the hazard. After being dropped, the ball must stay within 1 club length of the point at which you dropped. Because your relief area is behind the point of entry into the hazard, it does not matter if your ball rolls forward, as long as it stays within 1 club length of the point at which you dropped.

## The Rules Applied – April ‘23

Free Relief. It’s one of our favorite phrases on the golf course. We’ve talked about it before, in the context of cart path relief, relief from interior (protective) fences, and relief from other immovable objects. Here are some more instances of free relief:

*I hit a big tee shot on 18, but unfortunately pushed the ball way right, onto 16 green. Free relief?* Yes. In fact, relief from the wrong green is mandatory (Rule 13.1f) – if either your ball or your stance is on the wrong green, you must take relief. In taking relief, you identify your nearest point of relief no nearer the hole and drop within 1 club length. Remember that your drop must be in the same “area of the course” as your nearest point of relief. Bunkers, penalty areas, greens, tee boxes are all special areas of the course, while the remainder of the course is known as the general area. So if your nearest point of relief is in the general area, and your ball rolls into a bunker, you should re-drop – you do not play from the bunker.

*My buddy’s shot on 18 was even worse. He hit into a fallen tree on the right side of 18. Free relief for him?* This one is actually a bit tricky, but ultimately the answer is yes, he too can enjoy the benefits of the rules. Under one of the interpretations of the rules, a fallen tree is not automatically ground under repair, but a player may ask that the area affected be declared ground under repair, and the tournament committee would be justified in making that call. In our tournaments, the tournament committee is willing to state that in all cases of a fallen tree, the affected area is ground under repair, and free relief is granted. But if you play in an outside tournament, you should check with tournament officials.

*But what if the whole tree did not come down, just some branches, and my ball is lying in the middle of those sticks?* Sorry, branches and leaves do not count as ground under repair. They are simply loose impediments – they can be removed if this does not cause your ball to move; but otherwise, you must play it as it lies or take a 1-stroke penalty for an unplayable lie.

*I sense that there is an exception somewhere.* Well of course. Why make things easy? If branches or leaves are piled together for purpose of collection by the course, then the pile would be considered an abnormal course condition. In this case, free relief would be available. But this is allowed only where a pile has been put together for purposes of collection, not to a random pile of leaves.

## The Rules Applied – June ‘23

You start your round with a bag full of clubs, balls, tees, maybe a range finder, and various other items. But what if you need more of something during the round? This month we'll be talking about adding things during the round.

To start with, you are limited to 14 clubs in your bag. (Rule 4.1b.) If you have a 15<sup>th</sup> club, you may declare to the other players that the club is out of play or otherwise clearly indicate that it will not be used during the round. But this must be done before the round begins. If you do not clearly take the club out of play before you tee off, you are assessed a penalty – 2 strokes per hole, with a maximum of 4 strokes per round. (Rule 4.1b(4).)

You may not replace a club during a round simply because you're not hitting it well, or even because you lost it. However, as we pointed out in our rules discussion in March, if a club is damaged during the round (and not because you got mad and threw it), then it may be replaced, provided you do not unreasonably delay play of the round. (Rule 4.1a(2).)

And if you started with fewer than 14 clubs, you may add clubs up to the 14-limit. But no borrowing clubs from other players, and no altering clubs during a tournament round. (Rule 4.1b(2) and 4.1a(3).)

As for golf balls, there is (fortunately) no limit on the number of golf balls you may carry. And despite what you may have heard about a 1-ball rule (if you start with Titlist pro-v1, then you must play Titlist pro-v1 on every shot during the round), this rule is NOT in effect in our tournaments (it's an optional rule, which is usually in effect only in very high-level tournaments).

If you run out of golf balls, you may get additional balls from anyone, including another player! (Rule 4.2a(1).)

And if you lose your range finder or the battery goes dead? No worries here. Although there is a general rule prohibiting players from asking for advice or giving advice (rule 10.2a), this does not prohibit a player from asking for, or giving, publicly available information. The definition of "advice" specifically excludes information as to distance, position of the hole on the green, wind direction and the rules. Thus, if your own measuring device fails, you may ask another player for the distance.

## The Rules Applied – July '23

If you've played DeBell or any other public course, you've probably found your ball in a lie which is somewhat less than ideal. And your non-club friends always have an easy answer when they say – that's ground under repair. But is it?

*My ball is lying on a big area of dirt in the middle of the fairway. That's gotta be ground under repair, right?* Sorry, no. Big areas of dirt do not automatically qualify as ground under repair.

*What if there is a white line painted around the area?* Ah, that changes everything. Ground under repair is any area marked by the course or the tournament committee as such. White paint or stakes are typically used. Or the area can simply be described, as we sometimes do in connection with our tournaments.

*My ball came to rest in a little trench or groove near the green on hole 5. Do I get relief?* You are in luck, here. Even if not marked, any hole made by the maintenance staff in setting up or maintaining the course counts as ground under repair. This includes holes or trenches made for laying pipes, so yes, you do get relief. Unfortunately, this does not include aeration holes (See Definition of Ground Under Repair).

*What about animal holes? These are ground under repair, right?* Well, no. But both animal holes and ground under repair are classified as abnormal course conditions and the same rules apply to both. (Abnormal course conditions also include temporary water and immovable obstructions, both of which have been discussed in previous rules discussions.) Animal holes include the loose material dug out of the hole, any worn-down track leading into the hole, and any area of ground which is pushed up or altered as a result of the animal digging (See Definition of Animal Hole).

*So, if I get a free drop by reason of ground under repair or an animal hole, what do I do?* First, determine your nearest point of relief (no closer to the hole) by taking your stance with the club you intend to use. Mark that spot with a tee or other object. Second, take the longest club in your bag and measure 1 club length, again making sure you are no closer to the hole. Finally, drop your ball from knee height within the relief area. If the ball rolls out of the area, then drop again; and if it rolls out a second time, then place the ball on the spot that it hit the ground (Rule 16).

## The Rules Applied – August '23

*The fairway bunkers at DeBell are a mess, and BMGC has declared them to be waste areas. Great! One question – what's a waste area?*

Actually, this one is pretty simple. A waste area is a part of the course which is typically sandy or covered with natural vegetation, but not prepared as a bunker. It is sometimes confused for a bunker because of the presence of sand. But a bunker is a “specially prepared area”, as defined in the rules of golf, not an area growing “naturally”.

*So, what's the difference between how I play a bunker and a waste area?*

As you know, when you are in a bunker, you may not touch the sand right in front or behind your ball, with your hand, club or other object. You may not ground your club before you swing, and you may not touch the sand on a practice swing or even on the backswing of your stroke! Rule 12.2. The only exceptions to this are that you may remove loose impediments (like rocks), and you may mark your ball (for example, if it interferes with another player's swing or stance). In addition, you are also allowed to touch the sand if our lift, clean, rake and place rule is in effect.

In addition, you may not touch the sand anywhere in a bunker with your hand, club or other object for the purpose of testing the surface. However, if you are away from your ball, you may rake the bunker (for example, you might rake your footprints if you are entering on one side of the bunker and planning to exit on the other side); you may put extra clubs down in a bunker; you may lean against your club to prevent yourself from falling; and, surprisingly, you will not be penalized for striking the sand out of frustration or anger. On the other hand, you will be penalized if any of these actions improve the conditions affecting your stroke.

In a waste area, none of these restrictions apply – you may ground your club and touch the ground during practice swings.

*What if the ball is unplayable?*

If a ball in a bunker is unplayable, you may take lateral relief or back of the line relief with 1 penalty stroke, if you stay in the bunker. If you wish to take back of the line relief outside the bunker, you will have to take 2 penalty strokes. (Of course, you may take stroke and distance – that is, re-hit from your original point – at a cost of 1 penalty stroke.)

On the other hand, in a waste area, there is only 1 penalty stroke no matter what relief you take, including going as far back as you like for back of the line relief.

## The Rules Applied – September '23

Handicaps. If we're getting strokes, we love them. If we're giving strokes . . . not so much. Overall, the handicap system seems to work, as you can see in our tournaments, which are won by low, middle and high handicappers. But the system only works when scores are properly posted. To do this, you need to correctly record (and adjust) your scores, and then you must post all "acceptable" scores.

*Okay, so what is an acceptable score?* This applies to most formats where you play your own ball – tournaments or general play, even Stableford tournaments (although you would post a normal score, not the Stableford score); it even applies to match play. (Rules of Handicapping, 2.1.)

*How about scrambles? No. Shambles? No. Alternate shot?* You're being ridiculous. *How about the 4-club tournament?* No, if you are not playing your own ball, or if you are restricted in the number of clubs you can use, then the score should not be posted.

*Any other requirements?* The round must be played in accordance with the Rules of Golf, with one other person present. In general play, a player may follow a model rule of golf (a rule which may or may not be put into play, in the discretion of the tournament organizer), even if it has not officially been put in place.

*Okay, now what do you mean by correctly record and adjust scores?* (1) if you play out the hole, you should record your actual score. This may be essential in a tournament. But when posting your score, you will reduce it to a maximum of net double bogey (that is, double bogey plus any strokes you get because of your handicap). So, if your handicap is 15, then you get a stroke on Hole 5 at DeBell; your maximum score on that hole is then 7 (double bogey + 1). In a tournament, if your actual score was 9, then you would write 9 on your card; but for posting purposes, that score would be adjusted to a 7. (2) If you do not play a hole (perhaps due to darkness, or in match play, if your match ended early), then you record your score as net par (par, +1 if you get a stroke, or +2 if you get two strokes). (3) If you play a hole but do not finish it, then record the score you most likely would have gotten, but not more than the maximum score. (Eg, if you are lying 3, and a 2-footer is conceded, you'll record a 4; if a 20-footer is conceded, you'll probably assume 2 putts and record a 5. (Rules of Handicapping 3.1, 3.2, 3.3.)

*What if I play only a few holes?* You would not post only a few holes. But you can post a 9-hole score, if you play at least 7 holes (filling in net par on 8 and 9). If you played 13 holes, you would disregard any scores on 10-13, and post a 9-hole score. If you play at least 14 holes, you would post an 18-hole score, filling in the necessary net pars.

*So, do I always post my score?* In tournaments (other than match play), the club will post your score, if appropriate to do so. (Eg, not in a scramble.) If you do not



complete a hole, put an X on your card. In addition, if you X out a hole, be sure to write in the score that you most likely would have made, so that it can be accurately posted. Thus, in a partner better ball competition, if your partner birdies a par 4, then you might want to X out the hole and move on. But if you had only 2 feet for par, you should write X4 on your card, so that we can post a correct score for you.

## 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.



## The Rules Applied – November '23

We've now been going over rules for a couple of years, and this seems like a good time for a review. So here is a quick summary of some problem areas on the first few holes at DeBell.

Hole 1: *Tee shot goes right, behind the electrical box.*

The electrical box is an immovable obstruction. No line-of-sight relief. But if the box interferes with stance or swing, free relief at nearest point, no closer to the hole, plus 1 club length.

Hole 2: *Pushed tee shot right.*

- The fence is marked with red paint, which indicates a red-tipped penalty area. If you hit the ball over the fence, then a few options, but best choice will probably be to take a drop at point of entry, plus 2 club lengths, no closer to hole, with 1 stroke penalty.
- If the ball did not go over the fence and is playable, you're good to play it.
- If the ball is so close to the fence that the fence interferes with your stance or swing, then you get free relief from an immovable obstruction – nearest point of relief plus one club length. No penalty.
- If the ball is in the area marked ground under repair, then you get free relief at the nearest point, no closer to the hole, plus 1 club length. No penalty. This is true even if you cannot identify your ball, provided you know or are virtually certain the ball went into the area. If you are not virtually certain that the ball went into that area, then the ball must be deemed to have gone over (or through) the fence, and you must take a 1-stroke penalty.

Hole 3: Approach shot *runs over the green, across the cart path, and up against the back fence.*

Perimeter fences are boundary markers. You do not get free relief. If you cannot play the shot, you may declare it an unplayable lie and take a 1-stroke penalty. If you do this, you have three options: drop on a line straight back away from the hole (this is not available here, as that would put you outside the course); drop within 2 club lengths, no closer to the hole (this would be almost straight sideways, and – as long as your ball stays within the 2 club length area – you are stuck with it, even if it rolls back against the fence and is again unplayable); or rehit from your original location. If you are worried about the ball rolling into another difficult lie, your best bet might be to rehit from the original location.

Hole 4: *Hit my tee shot way right. Not sure if it stayed in play.*

Hit a provisional shot. To do this, you must clearly state to your playing partners that you are playing a provisional ball, and you must identify the original ball and the ball you are playing as a provisional.

Hole 4: *Hit my approach shot to the left of the green, into heavy grass on the left of the cart path.*

If you find your ball, you can play it. If you wish to deem it unplayable, you must take a 1 stroke penalty and have the options described above. Here the option of going straight back away from the hole might work best. If you cannot find the ball, it is lost, and you must take a “stroke and distance” penalty, that is a 1-stroke penalty, and you must drop at the location of your original shot. The area to the left of the cart path is not ground under repair, and therefore it does not matter if you are certain the ball went into the tall grass – if you cannot find it, it's lost. If you hit into the heavy grass to the left of 4, it would probably be best to hit a provisional shot before trekking up the hill to search for it.

More to come . . . .