

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.