



# tee time

October 2016

NEWSLETTER OF THE WELLINGTON GOLF REFEREES ASSOCIATION INC.

Greetings, and apologies for the long delay in presenting a second Tee Time for the year! There have been a few interesting rules issues this year. Let's delve into them! But first:

## Winter Rules: Marking Before Placing?

I noticed in a few tournaments over the winter when a lift, clean and place rule was in effect that some players did not mark their ball position before lifting and placing it at its new location. It is certainly bad practice, but is it a breach of the rules?

I would argue that technically it is not (assuming of course, the local rule does not specifically require marking before lifting, which it usually does not). Rule 20-1 requires a ball to be marked if lifted under a rule that requires it to be **replaced**. 'Replace' means put back in the same spot. Winter rules usually allow you to lift, clean and **place** in a different position.

Any argument could be avoided if clubs simply adopted the 'Winter Rules' wording in Appendix 1, Part A (Local Rules) of the Rules of Golf. The recommended wording there states 'Before lifting the ball, the player must mark its position'.

## Ryder Cup: Jordan Spieth Incident



You may have seen this incident during the Jordan Spieth – Henrik Stenson singles match in the Ryder Cup early this month. Jordan's ball ended up in a water hazard on the 16<sup>th</sup> hole at Hazeltine, at the very edge of the water. He apparently thought he could play it, but the ripples made when he placed his foot in the water caused the ball to move. The rules official appeared uncertain of what ruling applied and called for a ruling from the tournament senior rules official.

The ruling was clear-cut: Jordan had caused his ball to move and therefore incurred a one-stroke penalty. Replacing the ball could have been tricky, but on being advised of the penalty he conceded the hole and the match, losing 3 and 2. As we know, the result had no bearing on the tournament outcome, a victory for the USA.

## Dustin Johnston US Open Controversy

The ruling that created perhaps the most vitriol for the USGA and R&A was the penalty imposed on Dustin Johnston during the last round of the US Open at Oakmont back in June. You will recall that the attending official cleared Dustin of fault after his ball moved on the 5th green. But after the tournament officials viewed TV coverage of the incident they overruled the first official and imposed a one stroke penalty.

There were a couple of issues: firstly, the cause of the ball's movement. The walking referee asked Dustin if he'd grounded his club, and his answer was 'no'. Presumably Dustin was thinking of the old Rule 18-2b (Ball Moving after Address) removed in the 2016 Rules of Golf. Addressing the ball requires grounding behind or in front of the ball. Dustin had grounded his club, but to the side of the ball as he was practising his putting stroke. The ball moved shortly afterwards.

The second issue was that the officials advised Dustin on the 12<sup>th</sup> green that he might incur a penalty, but were still considering the issue. Dustin was finally advised of his one stroke penalty on the 18<sup>th</sup> green. While maintaining that the right decision was made, USGA Executive Director Mike Davis admitted later that they had handled the ruling poorly, leaving the tournament status up in the air, and apologised.

The sad thing was that the golfing media and players almost universally regarded the incident as a farce, and one non-golfing paper's headline read 'DJ Screwed by Dumb Rules Officials Who Want Everyone to Hate Golf'. Clearly the incident was a PR disaster for the game.

(In September at the Tour Championship at East Lake, Justin Thomas was penalised for a very similar incident and called it 'a God-awful rule',

pointing out that the section of the green on which his ball was lying was a 4% grade and the greens were running at 11-12 on the Stimpmeter!)

## Anna Nordqvist US Women's Open

In July, the USGA copped another battering in its handling of an incident involving Anna Nordqvist, Golfweek magazine calling it 'Another Clumsy Rules Situation'.

In this case Anna was assessed to have touched the sand in a bunker before making her stroke. She and her fellow-competitor, Brittany Lang, who were engaged in a play-off at the time, were advised of the two-stroke penalty during play of the next hole.

The controversy arose because of the timing of the advice: it allowed Lang to change her approach strategy: knowing she had a two-stroke advantage she changed clubs to a safer option.

Clearly the delay in advising Dustin Johnston of his penalty at the US Open was playing on the minds of the officials who this time acted as quickly as possible, but still copped flak for mistiming their advice!

## Olympic Tournament

Did you catch this fascinating piece published by the R&A just before the Rio Olympics? They contrasted the golf rules that applied during the last Olympic golf tournament in 1904 to those of the modern day. For example, a putting green in 1904 was 'all ground within 20 yards of the hole, excluding hazards'. Declaring an unplayable lie in 1904 would cost you two strokes, and you were required to tee the ball up at its place of relief. The complete article is here:

<http://www.randa.org/News/2016/08/Olympic-Golf--The-Rules-Then-vs-Now>

## Simplified Rules?

Golf Digest favourably reported in August that a mini-tour in the US had (seriously!) adopted its own simplified rules of golf as follows:

‘Treat the white stakes (out of bounds), the red stakes (lateral hazards) and yellow stakes (water hazards) equally, a one-shot penalty and take a drop at the nearest point of relief’.

The article commended the ‘local rule’ to the USGA for adoption.

## More (Tongue in Cheek) Rules:

### A FEW GOLF RULES FOR SENIORS

- There shall be no such thing as a lost ball. The missing ball is on or near the course and will eventually be found and pocketed by someone else, making it a stolen ball. The player is not to compound the felony by charging him or herself with a penalty.
- If a putt passes over a hole without dropping, it is deemed to have dropped. The law of gravity supersedes the law of golf.
- Putts that stop close enough to the cup that they could be blown in, may be blown in. This does not apply to balls more than three inches from the hole. No one wants to make a travesty of the game.
- There is no penalty for a so-called “out of bounds.” If penny-pinching golf club owners bought sufficient land, this would not occur. The golfer deserves an apology, not a penalty.
- There is no penalty for a ball in a water hazard, as golf balls should float. That they do not is a technical problem that manufacturers have yet to overcome. Senior golfers should not be punished for manufacturers’ shortcomings.



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## Rules Incidents

We’re always interested in sharing interesting Rules incidents in ‘Tee Time’. Please send any interesting rulings that you might become aware of to Terry Gardiner: [gardfam77@gmail.com](mailto:gardfam77@gmail.com)