



Know Your Rules

From wasp nests to mini volcanoes, I've encountered unusual situations while officiating in Northern California and different parts of the country. | Gail Rogers, Director of Education



During a playoff to qualify for match play of the Senior Women's Amateur Championship,

a player in my group hit the ball to the back of a double-level green. It was getting late in the day in South Carolina and she asked for relief from "stuff" on the green. I had been on the course for three days and had not seen the mini volcanoes pop up. I immediately consulted with the USGA and learned they were the casts of **mole crickets**, something I had never seen. The mounds were fixed, not loose like ant hills, and we had no Local Rule for them. The unfortunate ruling for the player was no relief. However, she was able to putt her ball toward the hole without hitting one of the conical fixed mounds.

It was at the same championship that I learned about **fire ants**. If you accidentally rake their nest, walk on one or strike it with a club, they swarm up the rake handle, your leg or the club biting immediately upon contact. All the players and officials learned to look and not make a stroke or rake a bunker without thought of the nasty creatures. While the superintendent sprayed most of the nests, we knew to give relief without penalty so players could move to a place of safety. And there was no need to even retrieve the ball as it was definitely a dangerous situation.

Another dangerous situation occurred at the U.S. Women's Amateur at Sleepy Hollow CC in N.Y. A player showed me her ball in a bunker where **wasps** were swarming. Fortunately there were two other bunkers near the green, one without wasps. Under the Rules of Golf she was able to drop a ball (she

did not have to recover her original ball) and play from the other bunker with no penalty. If all three bunkers had wasps she could have dropped outside the bunker



WASP PHOTO: DOGA RUTKOWSKI/ISTOCK

but with a penalty of one stroke. Needless to say, the superintendent sprayed the area so that the next players did not have the same problem.

One unfortunate ruling was during an NCGA four-ball tournament with a player who substituted a "**lucky putting ball**" for his tired old golf ball upon reaching the green. This is an illegal substitution and caused the player to incur a two-stroke penalty each time he substituted and played the ball. Since this was discov-

ered on the second day of the tournament and some of his scores from the prior day had counted for the team score without a two-stroke penalty, the team went from first place to disqualification. Certainly not a lucky day.

Don Armitstead, one of our recently retired tournament officials, came into my office laughing about an incident that had just happened during the CGA Match Play Tournament at Poppy Hills. It is the funniest ruling I can recall from all the years with the NCGA, that officials do not always know what they are looking for.

A player wanted relief because his stance was on a cart path and called Don over to ensure he proceeded properly. Seems simple enough, but when Don saw how far the ball was from the path he asked the player to address the ball to show that he had interference with his stance on the path. The player bent over, stretched his arms out and showed with an **exaggerated stance** that his feet were on the path. Don said, "You need to take your normal stance." So the player took the same stretched out stance again. Don was frustrated and trying to figure out what to say when he heard the opponent call to him from across the fairway, "He's been hitting it that way all day."

During our state amateur stroke-play qualifying a few years ago, a player and marker arrived at the scoring table just glaring at each other. The player had taken a few practice swings next to his ball on the 15th hole, **knocking down** some branches and numerous leaves, improving his area of intended swing. His marker knew it was a two-stroke penalty but did not know if it was for the breach in

general or for each swing. He struggled with discussing this with the player and when he finally told him, the player exploded. Not knowing whether he had two or six penalty strokes made his game disintegrate. He was angry with the marker who was both protecting the player from being disqualified without the penalty and protecting the rest of the field. After gathering the basic information I had the marker leave and found a place away from the scoring area where the player and I could talk.

We tried to have a discussion but he kept interrupting. Finally I said, "Time out. Here's the deal. You talk and I'll listen. When you're done I'll talk." I remember sitting across from him thinking I wanted to pay attention and look friendly, so I made eye contact, sat in a relaxed posture and rested my hands in my lap. Finally he stopped talking. I took a breath and started to say something but he jumped right back in. "I'm sorry. I didn't realize you weren't through." Then I waited. "OK," he finally said. "I'm ready to listen." While officiating you have to find your own way and trust your gut. Sometimes the approach is gentle, sometimes firm and serious and other times delivered with humor.

We ended up having an interesting discussion. He recognized that he was too good a player not to understand the Rules of Golf. He needed to know how the rules could help him when his ball was in a bad situation and trust his knowledge of the rules so he would not be distracted from his play. That applies to all of us: learn the rules and it will make your game better in ways you have yet to discover.

In the July 1997 maga-

zine, Lon Haskew, then chairman of the NCGA Rules Committee, entrusted his favorite subject, the Rules of Golf, to me. I have enjoyed finding new ways to encourage members to read and learn more about their favorite game. Now it is my turn to entrust the responsibility to another: John Vander Borgh, Junior Tour operations manager.

John writes a rules blog, has an average USGA Rules Test score of 99% and loves the history of the game. He is a member of the USGA Mid-Amateur Championship Committee and has been a rules official at the U.S. Open, Women's Open, Amateur, Women's Amateur, Senior Open and Senior Amateur. For two years he was a rules official for the

Duramed Futures Tour. "Know Your Rules" is now in the hands of a wonderful rules mind. You will benefit from John's experiences when he e-mails answers to your daily questions and writes columns for the magazine. Keep the e-mail and phone calls coming, but now send them to jborght@ncga.org.

As for me, I'll see you on the course. 🏌️

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