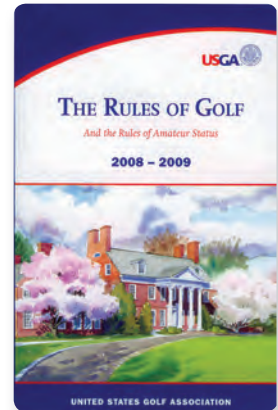


Know Your Rules

By John Vander Borcht, Manager Junior Tour



One question rules officials are frequently asked is when is a player allowed to clean his golf ball. Rule 21 covers when a ball may be cleaned and when it cannot. Despite being the shortest Rule in the book, many players still aren't always sure of their rights. There are three rules that specifically prohibit or limit cleaning the ball. There is also one decision that prohibits cleaning until the situation is known.



It is a great privilege to take over this column from the recently-retired Gail Rogers, someone who has done so much for golf in Northern California.

The three Rules that prohibit or limit cleaning are:

1 Rule 5-3 – Ball unfit for play. If you think you've damaged your ball, you can lift it to determine if it is damaged, but you can't clean it when doing so.

2 Rule 12-2 – Identifying your ball. If you can't see your identification mark and need to lift the ball to determine if it is yours, you are allowed to clean it to the extent necessary to determine if it is yours.

3 Rule 22 – Ball assisting or interfering with play. If your ball is in a position to assist another player, you can lift it. If your ball interferes with another person you can lift it if they ask you do to do so. In either case, the ball cannot be cleaned.

Decision 20-1/0.7: This decision prohibits cleaning until the situation is known. If you think your ball might be in a position where you will get relief, you may lift it by following a procedure

similar to Rules 5-3 and 12-2, but you may not clean it. For example, if you are unsure whether your ball is embedded or in a burrowing animal hole, you must announce your intention, allow someone to observe you, mark the position and lift the ball. If you are not entitled to relief, you must replace the ball without cleaning it. If you are entitled to relief, you may then clean it and take relief as appropriate.

If you violate any of these rules and clean your ball when prohibited, the penalty is one stroke.

Now, let's move on to when you can clean your golf ball. There is one place where you can always clean your golf ball—when it is on the putting green. So, as an example using Rule 22, if your ball is next to the hole in a position to assist someone who is chipping their ball, you may lift it, and since it was on the put-

ting green, clean it.

You may also clean your golf ball in the following situations:

If it is in ground under repair or on a cart path and you intend on taking relief, you may clean it.

Under penalty of one stroke, if your ball is unplayable, or in a water hazard, you may clean your golf ball before playing your next stroke.

If you accidentally move your ball or it moves after you've addressed it, with a one-stroke penalty you may clean the ball before replacing it.

If you are searching for your ball in a bunker and accidentally move it, you can clean it before replacing it.

Bear in mind, if you want to clean your ball when it is anywhere other than the green, you can—just don't forget to add one stroke to your score. 📍



*Cleaning
is always
allowed on
the green.*

*If you can't see your identification
mark and need to lift the ball
to determine if it is yours,
you are allowed to clean
it to the extent necessary
to determine if it is yours.*

