

## The Get Out of Jail Free card

*When you may use it, and when you must roll doubles...*

By Jeff Ninnemann

*Assistant Director of Rules and Competitions*

**O**ftentimes, we as Rules Officials get asked complex questions in search of simple answers. While *The Rules* and *Decisions on The Rules of Golf* may seem to be all encompassing, there are actually scenarios that our 555-page code does not cover...or better put, scenarios that leave room for shades of gray to creep in.

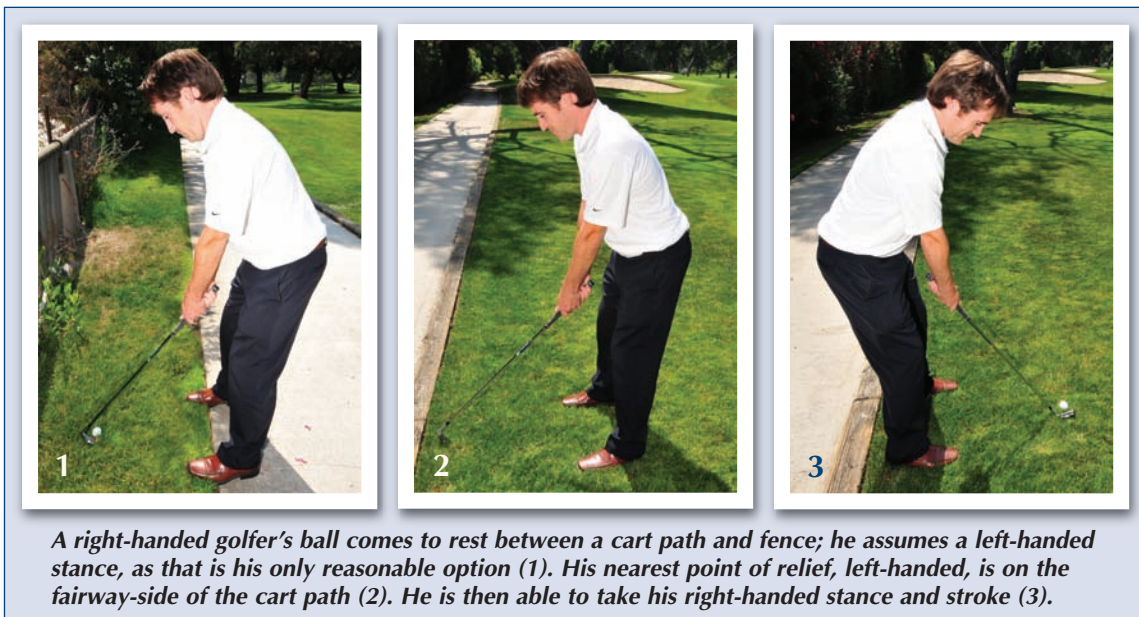
One question I frequently get asked is, "As a right-handed golfer, may I assume a left-handed stance in order to get relief from a cart path?" The simple answer? It depends, and that's where the fun begins!

In the pictures below, a right-handed golfer's ball has come to rest on a very narrow strip of grass between a cart path and an out of bounds fence. For argument's sake, let's assume that this strip is too narrow for a player to take a stance within. The cart path is an 'immovable obstruction' from which the player may take relief under Rule 24-2b. The out of bounds fence is, by definition, NOT an obstruction but rather a 'fixed' object – something that relief may not be taken from without penalty.

The question that we as officials are trained to ask the player is, "**How would you play this stroke if the obstruction didn't exist?**" Remember, golf is a game of honor and integrity – you owe your fellow competitors an honest answer! If the player were to respond by truthfully stating that the only way he would play a stroke at the ball (even if the path were not there) is by using a left-handed stance, then in most cases we would allow the player to take relief from the cart path as it now interferes with his stance for the upcoming stroke (photo 1). Since there isn't enough space for the player to determine his nearest point of relief between the cart path and the boundary fence, his nearest point of relief would be on the fairway-side of the cart path (see photo 2; I can already imagine your creative minds jumping to the next

step!). Once relief has been taken and the ball is back in play, Decision 24-2b/17 reads, "...The player may then use a normal right-handed swing for his next stroke. If the obstruction interferes with the swing or stance for the right-handed stroke, the player may take relief (in effect a second time) for the right-handed stroke in accordance with Rule 24-2b." See photo 3.

**The moral of this example is that this isn't a Rule which has been created for the player to abuse.** As a Rules official or fellow-competitor, it is your responsibility to survey the scene and "assist" in determining whether or not the abnormal stance is reasonable given the circumstances. If there is enough room for the player to take a right-handed stance (albeit less comfortable than usual), make sure the player would hit the stroke left-handed **even if the cart path weren't there** before this procedure takes place. Whenever gray areas arise and judgment calls are required to be made, it's always a good idea to have the honest support of your fellow competitors.



We've all encountered the player who tries to bend the Rules a bit too far, so for them, don't forget about the infamous sister decision: 24-2b/18. It asks the question: "A right-handed player's ball is in a poor lie. A nearby immovable obstruction would not interfere with a normal right-handed swing but it would interfere with a left-handed swing. The player says he wishes to play his next stroke left-handed and, since the obstruction would interfere with such a stroke, he is entitled to proceed under Rule 24-2b. May the player invoke Rule 24-2b? No. If the only reason for the player to use a left-handed stroke is to escape a poor lie, use of an abnormal (left-handed) stroke is not justifiable and the player is not entitled to invoke Rule 24-2b."

In plain English, good luck rolling doubles! ■