

How can I help you?

A lesson in working with Rules Officials

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Competing in tournaments as a junior golfer, I learned at an early age how to handle Rules Officials on the golf course. I lived by three rules:

First, avoid eye contact. Second, don't volunteer any information. Third, take the most circuitous route possible to the next tee to avoid any sort of confrontation.

Since becoming a Rules Official several years ago, my outlook on this topic has dramatically changed. Here are some common myths about Rules Officials and tips on using their assistance. And when you see a Rules Official heading your way, feel free to offer up a smile or even say hello — after all, he's here to help.

Debunked: Common misconceptions about Rules Officials

1 Rules Officials are not marshals. Referring to a Rules Official as a marshal is the equivalent of mentioning Hoegaarden and Pabst Blue Ribbon in the same breath. A Rules Official has numerous roles at a tournament, and monitoring the pace of play may be only one of his duties for the day.

2 Rules Officials do not always know where your golf ball is. Occasionally, an official will be given an assignment of spotting or forecaddieing. This does not mean that he knows the GPS coordinates of your tee shot that has come to rest in the jungle 40 yards right of the fairway. There are three signs (common baseball signals) that a Rules Official acting in this capacity might give you:

- **Safe:** Your ball is on the course but it is not necessarily playable.
- **Out** (both arms pointing in the direction of a boundary or water hazard): Your ball is out of bounds or in a water hazard.
- **No sign:** The Rules Official does not know where your ball is. Playing a provisional ball would be advisable.

3 Rules Officials are not lurking in the bushes, waiting for you to breach a rule so they can slap a two-stroke penalty on you. The primary purpose of a Rules Official is to assist the player, and help him or her to avoid penalties, if possible.

4 Rules Officials do not have every Rule memorized. There are 40,000 words in *The Rules of Golf*, not to mention 555 pages of *Decisions on The Rules of Golf*. They may need to look up a Rule in the book or inquire on the radio about a specific situation. This is all done to ensure that the correct ruling is given.



Rules Officials (like SCGA Committeeman Lynn McClung) are at the course to make everyone's round run smoothly.

What to do if you have a Rules issue

Have you ever had a situation on the golf course where you found your ball...and then had no idea what to do? The following tips can help save penalty strokes and make for a more enjoyable tournament.

1 If you have any doubt, do not pick up your golf ball. Penalty strokes can often be avoided when the ball is not in your hand.

2 If you are unsure how to proceed and there is an official present, ask for assistance. Better safe than sorry; it could save you penalty strokes in the long run.

3 If there is not an official nearby, do not delay play waiting for one. Rule 3-3 (*Doubt as to Procedure*) allows for the playing of two balls in stroke play, when a competitor is unsure of his rights.

4 Two things to remember when proceeding under Rule 3-3: First, announce to your marker or fellow-competitor you are proceeding under Rule 3-3 and which ball you want to count if the Rules permit. Second, report the facts to the Committee before returning your scorecard. If you do not do so, you will be disqualified.

REMEMBER When working with a Rules Official, the most important thing to keep in mind is there is no need to get confrontational. The Rules Official is more than likely a volunteer who is donating his time to help you get back to playing golf. If you do not understand the ruling an official has given, feel free to ask questions. If you are still unsure or you disagree with the ruling that was given, you are always entitled to ask for a second opinion. ■