

## [Santa Teresa Women's Golf Club](#)

### Rules Corner #10 - Some Actions that Raised Questions

1. As we were teeing off on the second round of this year's Club Championship a couple of women were practicing putts on the men's tee, and one was making baby chips on the other side of the path. This is common while waiting to tee off. One lady pointed out that the Rule Book prohibits practice on the course the day of a tournament, and these players were in violation of the rule. This took me by surprise, because while I know the rule cited, I didn't think it applied here. But it was my turn to tee off, so I said I would look it up. It is Rule 7-1 on page 35 if you want to read the full text.

Briefly, in **Match Play** on the day of the tournament you may practice on the competition course before a round. But in **Stroke Play** a player may not practice on the competition course or test the surface of a putting green before playing that day.

***At this point it looks like the ladies were in violation of the rule – but keep reading***

"Exception: Practice putting or chipping on or near the first teeing ground before starting a round or play off is permitted."

2. During the next round I had discussed this with the rest of my foursome. Then on the 10<sup>th</sup> green I misread a short putt, and when everyone was done, I tried it again to see what the line really was. But wasn't I practicing on the course during a tournament?

Rule 7-2 also on page 35 clearly states that a player must not make a practice stroke during play of a hole. But between two holes a player may practice putting or chipping on or near the putting green of the hole last played, or on the teeing ground of the next hole to be played.

BUT - both golf etiquette and the rules say that you must not hold up play by such a practice stroke

*There are several crucial words involved. Rule 7-1 deals with practice **before** play, and Rule 7-2 deals with practice **during** play. Also note that a **practice stroke** is prohibited but not a **practice swing**. Small words, but a big difference in action.*

3. The third action came up as a result of talking about the above changes. One member pointed out that while we routinely pick up the flagstick before all players have holed out, that is against the rules.

True, Rule 17-3 states that "the player's ball must not strike: a. The flagstick when it is attended, removed, or held up", with a two stroke penalty if it does.

So this opinion has basis in fact. Until several years ago a flagstick that had been taken out of the hole and laid aside was still considered to be under the control of the person who had attended the flagstick. Thus when a putted ball appeared to be apt to hit the flag stick on the ground, the **only person** permitted to pick the flag stick up was the person who put in on the ground in the first place.

But later rulings have changed that. Now Rule 24-1-b states "when a ball is in motion, an obstruction that might influence the movement of the ball, **other than equipment of any player or the flagstick**, when attended, removed or held up, must not be moved." In plain English that means that if a ball is in motion and may hit another player's equipment or the flag stick, the obstruction may be moved by anyone.

*These examples show how important a single word can be in a ruling, and how easy it is to take a legitimate rule and carry it to other, similar, but not the same, situations.*

4. While I promised to stay away from odd ball situations, something happened to me recently that I had read about, but never actually seen, so I decided to pass it along. There are two bunkers in front of our #3 green that are off to the right with the one nearest the green having a very high slope. I was just short of the first one so had to pitch over both bunkers, yet because it was a red flag, I didn't want to land near the back of the green.

I hit a wonderful high shot that unfortunately landed about 1 or 2 inches inside the top edge of the bunker. When we got to the green, there was no ball anywhere, but I was sure it was in the bunker, and buried. But the sand – brand new, light fluffy stuff - was perfectly smooth, with no mark of any kind. The other players said it couldn't be in the bunker without leaving some sort of dent or track. But I persisted, and took a rake, and very gently raked the place where I thought it was. Nothing. So I raked just a bit harder and the rake touched something. I climbed into the bunker, and very carefully smoothed the sand away until I uncovered the top of a golf ball. The view was only about the size of a nickel (or quarter) but I could see my black stripe, so I knew it was mine.

Now with only the top of the ball showing I could take a swing at it. (Had I needed to uncover more of the ball in order to identify it, I would have had to rebury it to the point only the top could have been seen.)

Using a trick I learned years ago (but never actually used) I chopped down hard on the ball and it popped up and landed about 6 inches on the grass. A spectacular recovery! Sadly, it did me little good because I flubbed the approach, and then 3 putted.

BUT - were my actions legal? Rule 12-1, Searching for Ball; Seeing Ball deals with exactly this situation in the third paragraph that starts "In a hazard" and the section goes on to vindicate my actions. It even permits the use of a club as well as the rake I used.