



# DUTIES OF A RULES OFFICIAL – Golf Australia Recommendations

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Further information can be found in The R&A's "Guidance on Running a Competition".

Golf, for the most part, is self-regulatory as it is played without a Rules Official being present. A Committee in charge of a competition may appoint a Referee or perhaps an Observer, to accompany play, or it may assign Committee Members to particular parts of the course to assist players with the Rules.

## Referees

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A referee is defined in the Rules of Golf as one who is appointed by the Committee to accompany players to decide questions of fact and apply the Rules. A referee will act on any breach of a Rule they observe or is reported to them.

It is not sufficient for a referee merely to give a correct decision when appealed to: they must also at all times be sufficiently alert to observe accurately and to interpret correctly all events which may occur during a round. Within the scope of these duties a referee is assigned to a match to help ensure that it will be fairly played under sporting conditions.

This brings up the question of the referee's ethical position when a player is about to break the Rules or demonstrates in some way that they are unaware of their rights and obligations under the Rules or the Conditions of Competition (this includes for example, whether they receive a handicap stroke(s) on a hole). The referee does not have the authority to prevent a willful breach of the Rules, but certainly does have the obligation to advise the players about the Rules. It would be contrary to the spirit of fair play if a referee failed to inform a player of their rights and obligations under the Rules or the Conditions of Competition and then penalised the player for a breach that could have been prevented.

The following are things a referee should do in order to prevent a breach of the Rules:

- Ask players on the first tee if they have counted their clubs.
- Ask players on the first tee to identify the brand and number of their ball.
- If a player at any time plays a provisional ball or puts a second ball into play, ensure that the player can identify both balls.
- If a player tees their ball ahead of the markers, draw their attention to it before they drive.
- If a player is about to lift a loose impediment in a hazard or water hazard, remind them their ball is in a hazard.
- If a player is about to adopt a wrong dropping procedure, call their attention to it and point out the correct procedure.
- If a player is about to play a second ball, ask the player whether it is a provisional ball.

*Another important general aspect of refereeing is the manner in which a referee performs their duties. When golf is played at a level where referees are present, the players concerned may be under considerable pressure. A heavy-handed or unsympathetic approach is likely to be unhelpful and could have a detrimental effect on a player by disturbing their concentration. Therefore, a referee should attempt to perform duties with understanding and tact. It is important to sense when to talk to a player and when to be silent.*

**List of Duties**At the First Tee:

- If players are less experienced, remind them of the role of the referee (ie to be of assistance to the players and to be on hand should they be doubtful as to the correct procedure in a situation)
- Ask players whether they have counted their clubs
- Ask the players to ensure they can identify the ball they are using

On the Tee:

- Be in a position to see the balls teed – as mentioned above, a referee should not stand back and watch a player tee their ball from outside the teeing ground

Between Tee and Green:

- Arrive at the players' balls ahead of the players in case there is doubt as to which player is first to play
- Be in a position to see each player address and play the ball
- Try to help players to avoid breaches by calling their attention to Rules they may be about to break

It is recommended that a referee try to position themselves to observe each player making each stroke, although in some circumstances this will obviously not be possible. However, the referee should be careful not to hover around players to the extent that it could be a distraction and make the player feel uncomfortable.

On the Putting Green:

- Do not handle the ball or flag (except in measuring)
- Ensure the ball is replaced in the correct place if lifted (or if moved a putter-head length to the side)

On occasions a player can be careless in their observance of a Rule. If there has been no actual breach the referee should ensure the player is familiar with the Rule. In a relief situation, the referee should advise the player not to touch the ball until the course of action has been decided. If applicable, the prescribed dropping area should be marked.

The referee should not leave the player simply because the prescribed dropping area has been established. They should remain in position to assist the player if a dropped ball rolls into a position requiring it to be re-dropped, or if the dropped ball strikes the player or their equipment. Conversely, the player may think that a ball that has been dropped and is in play should be re-dropped. The referee should be on hand to prevent the player from lifting a ball that is in play. Once the ball is in play, the referee should move away from the player entirely.

At times awkward situations will arise. The referee should be firm and positive, but take plenty of time. It is always as well to consult the Rule Book and it may help to let the players read it. When faced with a problem, it is often of considerable assistance to find out the player's intention. A determination of this can be also very useful as a routine approach to a questionable action, for example, if the player appears to test the depth of sand in a bunker, or to touch the line of putt when there are no visible loose impediments removed.

**Observers**

An observer is defined in the Rules of Golf as one who is appointed by the Committee to assist a referee to decide questions of fact and to report to them any breach of a Rule. Before play, it is important for a referee to reach an understanding with their observer as to their respective duties. Usually it is best for the observer to work ahead of the match as much as possible.

An observer, by stationing themselves in the area where the ball may be expected to come to rest, may be in a position to determine questions of fact which the referee, from their position near the players, could not hope to decide.

*In an important match or grouping, the services of an alert Observer are invaluable to a referee.*

**Committee Members**

When Committee members are watching play either by chance or through having been assigned a particular place on the course, their duties are different from those of a referee.

In match play without a referee, the players involved in a particular match are there to protect their own interests and there is no reason for a Committee member to take any notice of a breach of the Rules that may be observed, unless they are satisfied that the opponent is not in a position to observe the breach. Their presence on the course is solely to assist players in the event of a claim (Rule 2–5). Handling of a situation will depend on whether the Committee has granted individual members unlimited authority to represent the Committee and make final decisions. This is an issue which the Committee should clarify in advance.

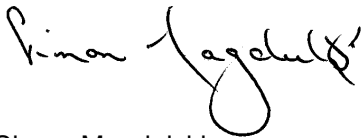
However, deferring a decision should be resorted to only in exceptional circumstances, since it is a principle of match play that each side is entitled to know the state of the match at all times.

In stroke play the situation is different. Every competitor has a direct interest in the play of all other competitors. Every Committee member, therefore, has a duty to represent the interests of every competitor in the field. Thus a Committee member must act on any probable breach of the Rules which is observed.

This may be done by immediately questioning the competitor about a procedure. Also, they may be called upon to make decisions on the course – this process should be handled as in match play except that the need for an immediate decision is less urgent.

We hope that this document assists in the management of your golf competitions. Please feel free to contact your state association if you have any queries or if you would like any further information.

Kind regards,



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