

Rule Tip of the Week

Know the Rules!

It definitely pays to know the Rules, which, by definition, include any Local Rules and Conditions of Competition that have been established by the Committee for the competition. Not knowing the Rules can cost you precious strokes as Lexi Thompson recently discovered at the 2018 Honda LPGA Thailand event at the Siam Country Club.

While playing the 15th hole during her second round, Lexi Thompson and her caddie attempted to remove an advertising sign. The sign was not interfering with the lie of her ball, her stance, or the area of her intended swing. However, the sign was intervening on her line of play.

After Lexi and her caddie had given up trying to pull out the sign posts from the ground, two spectators quickly stepped in and removed the sign for them. Unfortunately for Lexi, the sign was not a movable obstruction. Had the sign been a movable obstruction, then Lexi could have had the sign moved without penalty pursuant to Rule 24-1 [Movable Obstruction].

However, the advertising sign was actually a temporary immovable obstruction (TIO) according to a Local Rule adopted by the LPGA for the event! Part A of Appendix I [Local Rules; Conditions of Competition] sets forth the recommended Local Rule for temporary immovable obstructions. The relief procedure under this Local Rule mandates that Lexi drop her ball (a) not nearer the hole than where her ball came to rest and (b) within one club-length of the point where intervention interference, as defined by the Local Rule, no longer exists.

When Lexi sanctioned the removal of the TIO, she was in breach of the Local Rule. The stated penalty for a breach of this Local Rule is two strokes in stroke play. Incidentally, she was also effectively in breach of Rule 13-2 [Improving Lie, Area of Intended Stance or Swing, or Line of Play] by “*moving, bending or breaking anything growing or fixed (including immovable obstructions and objects defining out of bounds)...*”

What if Lexi had questioned the removal of the advertising sign before playing her next stroke? Could she have avoided the penalty by first having the sign replaced and then following the relief procedure prescribed by the Local Rule? Unfortunately for Lexi, there was actually no way for her to avoid the two-stroke penalty once the sign was removed! See Decision 13-2/25 [Player Removes Boundary Post on Line of Play But Replaces It Before Playing] which states, in part, “*The player was in breach of Rule 13-2 the moment he moved the post and there was nothing he could do to avoid the penalty.*”

To underscore the importance of knowing the Rules, consider the following scenario that is essentially a reverse twist of Lexi Thompson’s scenario in Thailand: A player’s ball comes to rest near a post. The player is not aware of the fact that the post is a movable obstruction as defined by a Local Rule. Instead of removing the post and playing his ball as it lies, the player proceeds under the incorrect belief that the post is an immovable obstruction! He determines the nearest point of relief from the post under inapplicable Rule 24-2 [Immovable Obstruction], then drops and plays the ball. Unfortunately, as a result of the player lifting his ball in play and then failing to replace it before playing his next stroke, in stroke play, he incurs a two-stroke penalty under Rule 18-2 [Ball at Rest Moved by Player...]. See Decision 18-2/4 [Ball Lifted and Dropped Away from Movable Obstruction].

