

Rule Tip of the Week Dyeabological!

Pete Dye's design of the closing stretch of holes at TPC Sawgrass is truly diabolical and has helped to elevate the reputation of the Players Championship which is now regarded as golf's unofficial fifth major. As usual, it was par for this course that, during the 2018 edition of the Players Championship, there were numerous incidents of players' balls ending up in water hazards. This article highlights one particular incident which just happens to provide several interesting teaching points on the Rules.

The incident occurred during the first round with Brian Harman playing the iconic island green par-3 17th hole. His tee shot ended up dry and not too far from the hole. However, his ball was in a diabolical lie embedded in the turf right next to the bulkhead at the front of the island. After carefully studying the situation for several minutes, Harman eventually decided that he did not want to risk playing the ball from such a precarious lie.



So, what were Brian Harman's options at that point? Could he take relief for an embedded ball? Perhaps he could obtain relief without penalty for stance and/or swing interference caused by the wooden bulkhead? Or, at the very least, what about the possibility of Harman deeming his ball unplayable and dropping a ball on the putting green within two club-lengths of, and no nearer the hole than, where the original ball came to rest?

Unfortunately for Brian, as shown in the close-up photograph to the right, his ball ended up inside the yellow line defining the margin of the water hazard. Because his ball was in the water hazard, it was not lying *through the green*. The Definition of "*through the green*" advises, "*Through the green* is the whole area of the course except: a. The teeing ground and putting green of the hole being played, and b. All hazards on the course."

Since Harman's ball was not lying through the green, he could not take relief for the embedded ball. Rule 25-2 [Embedded Ball] states, in part, "*If a player's ball is embedded in any closely-mown area through the green, it may be lifted, cleaned and dropped, without penalty, as near as possible to the spot where it lay but not nearer the hole.*"

The hard card for the PGA Tour designates artificial retaining walls and pilings as integral parts of the course when they are located within water hazards. Per the Definition of "Obstructions," any construction designated by the Committee to be an integral part of the course is not an obstruction. Thus, Harman could not get relief from lie, stance or area of intended swing interference by the bulkhead. By the way, if Harman had decided to play the ball as it lay adjacent to the bulkhead, he would have been permitted to ground his club on the bulkhead. See the Note to Rule 13-4 [Ball in Hazard; Prohibited Actions] which points out, "*At any time, including at address or in the backward movement for the stroke, the player may touch, with a club or otherwise, any obstruction [or] any construction declared by the Committee to be an integral part of the course*"

Even if the PGA Tour had not designated the bulkhead as an integral part of the course, Harman would not have been able to obtain relief under Rule 24-2b [Immovable Obstruction] because his ball was in the water hazard. That Rule states, in part, "*Except when the ball is in a water hazard or a lateral water hazard, a player may take relief from interference by an immovable obstruction*"

Finally, since Harman's ball was situated within the water hazard, he could not avail himself of Rule 28 [Ball Unplayable]. That Rule states, in part, "*The player may deem his ball unplayable at any place on the course, except when the ball is in a water hazard.*"

So, with no reasonable recourse available for Harman to play his ball without leaving the island, he pried it out of the turf and angrily threw his ball into the water, before heading over to the dropping zone. Safely on the green from there and two putts later, he carded a double-bogey 5 for the hole. Needless to say, Brian Harman will probably not be sending Pete Dye a Christmas card this year!!