

# RCGA Rules (abridged version)

The following is an abridged version of the

## RCGA Golf Rules

as originally published by



The original *Golfing Ontario* version has been modified by the HCAA and presented below to reflect HCAA championship play.

The rules highlighted in **bold type** are commonly poorly understood – please pay special attention to these and make sure you understand them completely.

### ● The Game

- You must always play by the Rules. You are not allowed to change them.
- Some adaptations to the Rules may be given to you by the tournament organizer (these may include “local rules” and “tournament rules”)

### ● Stroke Play

- **You must play the ball into the hole before starting the next hole. No "gimmies" (notwithstanding the HCAA “maximum score” rule)**

### ● Clubs and the Ball

- You may carry no more than fourteen clubs.
- Normally, you may not change balls during the play of a hole. However, if you damage or cut your ball, you may do so after first asking your fellow competitor(s).

### ● Things a Player Should Do

- Read the notices given to you by the tournament officials.

- **Make sure you play your own ball** (put a distinguishing mark on the ball with a marker in case someone else is using an identical ball).
- Make sure your score for each hole is correct before you turn in your card.
- Keep playing unless there is lightning, you are ill, or an official tells you to stop.

#### ● Practice

- You may not hit a practice shot during play of a hole, or from any hazard.  
Note: Always read the local rules about practice.

#### ● Advice on How to Play

- During a round, you may not ask anyone for advice on how to play. However, you may ask about Rules or the position of hazards or the flagstick.
- You may not give advice to your opponent or a fellow-competitor.

#### ● When to Play a Shot

- The player who has the lowest score on a hole has the right to play first on the next hole. This is called the "honor."
- During play of a hole, the player whose ball is farthest from the hole plays first (in HCAA play, if the play of your grouping is slow, the order may be altered – this is called "ready golf")

#### ● Teeing Ground

- Tee your ball between the tee-markers or a little behind them. You may go behind them as far as two club lengths.
- If your ball accidentally falls off the tee, you may replace it without penalty.

#### ● Taking a Drop

- Determine, by rule, the exact spot where the ball will be dropped. Mark the spot with a tee. Drop the ball on that spot from knee height. The ball must come to rest within one club length (longest club in your bag that is not a putter) of that spot. If it doesn't, drop again. If it still doesn't stay within one club length, the ball may be placed on the drop spot.

## ● Finding Ball in Hazard -- Identifying Ball

- A hazard is any bunker (area of sand) or water hazard (lake, pond, creek, etc.).
- In a bunker or water hazard, if your ball is covered by sand or leaves, you may remove enough of the sand or leaves to be able to see a part of the ball.
- You may lift your ball to identify it anywhere except in a hazard. You must tell your opponent or fellow competitor before you lift your ball to identify it.

## ● Playing Lies and the Course

- You must play the ball as it lies. You may not move it to a better spot (unless the “local rules” or “tournament rules” allow an exception).
- You may not improve your lie by pressing down behind the ball. The club may be grounded only lightly behind the ball.
- **You may not improve the area of your intended swing or line of play by bending or breaking anything growing, such as tree limbs or weeds.**
- **In a hazard, you may not touch the sand, ground, or water with the club before or during your backswing.**
- **In a bunker, you cannot touch the sand with your club in the area right in front of or right behind your ball, during your backswing, or in taking practice swings**
- In a hazard, you may not remove loose impediments (natural things such as leaves or twigs), but you may remove obstructions (artificial objects such as bottles or rakes.)
- In a bunker, you may move loose impediments, provided it does not cause your ball to move
- In a bunker, you have the option to declare the ball unplayable by dropping the ball outside the bunker (back-on-the-line) and counting 2 penalty strokes.
- Free relief is allowed if your ball is embedded (part of your ball is below ground level in the spot it hit the ground) on the fairway.

## ● Striking the Ball

- You must fairly strike the ball with the head of the club. You may not push, scrape or rake the ball.
- You must not hit your ball while it is moving.
- There is no penalty for an accidental double hit. It only counts as one stroke.

## ●Playing a Wrong Ball

- **If you play a ball that is not yours, you must take a two-stroke penalty (unless the wrong ball was played in a hazard). You must then play out the hole with your own ball. If you do not do so, you are disqualified.**

## ●The Putting Green

- If any part of your ball is touching the green, it is considered to be on the green.
- When your ball is on the green, you may brush away leaves and other loose impediments on your line of putt with your hand or a club. Do not fan them with a cap or towel.
- You may repair ball marks, old hole plugs, and spike marks (or other shoe damage)
- You may not test the surface of the green by rolling a ball or scraping the surface.
- Always mark your ball by putting a small coin or other marker behind it when you want to pick it up to clean or get it out of another player's way.

## ●The Flagstick

- It is not against the rules to leave the flagstick in when putting.

## ●Moving the Ball

- **If you move your ball on purpose or accidentally, add a penalty stroke to your score, replace and play it. EXCEPTION – if you accidentally move your ball while searching for it, replace it without penalty.**
- If your ball is moved by someone or something other than you (an “outside agency”), there is no penalty, but you must replace it. If the ball is moved by wind or water, you must play it as it lies. NOTE: When a ball that has been marked, lifted, and replaced on the putting green has been moved by wind to another position, replace the ball on the original spot.
- If your ball or ball marker accidentally get moved on the putting green, there is no penalty, and the ball or ball marker must be replaced to their original position.
- **Once you address the ball, if the ball moves, add a penalty stroke and replace the ball.**
- **If you move a loose impediment within one club-length of the ball and the ball moves, add a penalty stroke, replace it and play it. On the putting green, there is no penalty.**

#### ● Ball in Motion Deflected or Stopped

- If your ball hits an outside agency, (bird, rake, etc.), it is called a "rub of the green." There is no penalty and the ball is played as it lies.
- If your ball hits a fellow competitor or his/her equipment, there is no penalty and the ball is played as it lies (same as hitting an "outside agency").
- There is no penalty if your ball accidentally hits you or your equipment after a stroke.
- If your ball hits another ball and moves it, you must play your ball as it lies. The owner of the other ball must replace it. If your ball is on the green when you play and the ball which your ball hits is also on the green, you are penalized two strokes. Otherwise, there is no penalty.

#### ● Lifting and Dropping the Ball

- If you are going to lift your ball under a Rule and the Rule requires that the ball be replaced, you must put a ball-marker behind the ball before you lift it (unless the "tournament rules" allow an exception).
- **When you drop a ball, make the drop from KNEE height.**
- **If a dropped ball hits the ground and rolls into a hazard, out of hazard, more than two club-lengths, nearer the hole or, if you are dropping away from an immovable obstruction or ground under repair, etc., back into the obstruction or ground under repair, you must re-drop. If the same thing happens when you re-drop, you must place the ball where it struck the ground when it was re-dropped.**

#### ● Cleaning the Ball

- You may usually clean your ball when you are allowed to lift it. You may not clean the ball when you lift it for identification (except on the green), lift it because it interferes with another player, or lift it to determine if it is unfit.

#### ● Ball Interfering with or Assisting Play

- If another ball interferes with your swing or is in your line of putt, you may ask the owner of the ball to lift it.

- If your ball is near the hole and might serve as a backstop for another player, you may lift your ball.

#### ● Loose Impediments

- Loose impediments are natural objects that are not growing or fixed -- such as leaves, twigs, branches, worms, and insects. You may remove a loose impediment, even in the penalty area, as long as you do not cause your ball to move.

#### ● Obstructions

- **Obstructions are artificial or man-made objects. Bottles, tin cans, rakes, etc., are movable obstructions. Sprinkler heads, shelter houses, cart paths, etc., are immovable obstructions.**
- **Movable obstructions anywhere on the course may be removed. If the ball moves, it must be replaced without penalty.**
- **You may drop your ball away from an immovable obstruction if it interferes with your swing or stance. Find the nearest point not nearer the hole where you can play without interference with your swing or stance. Drop the ball within one club-length of that point. Note: You should not pick up the ball from an obstruction until you have established the nearest point of relief.**

#### ● Where The Ball Lies

- **Casual water is any temporary puddle of water caused by rain or over watering. Ground under repair is any damaged area which the tournament committee has marked as such or indicated on the "local rules".**
- **If your ball or your stance is in casual water, ground under repair or a burrowing animal hole, you may either play the ball as it lies or find the nearest place not nearer the hole which gives you relief and drop the ball within one club-length of that place.**
- **If your ball is in casual water, etc., and you cannot find it, determine where the ball entered the area and drop a ball within one club-length of that place without penalty.**

- If your ball is on the wrong green, find the nearest place off the green which is not nearer the hole and drop the ball within one club-length of that place.

#### • Penalty Areas (yellow stakes/lines)

- Typically water hazards, but can include other marked hazards (e.g. steep drop).
- If your ball is in a penalty area marked by yellow stakes or lines, you may play it as it lies. You can remove loose impediments, ground your club, and take practice swings, just as long as you do not cause your ball to move.
- If your ball is in a penalty area marked by yellow stakes or lines and you cannot find it or do not wish to play it, you may:
  1. Add a penalty stroke and drop and play another ball from where you last played.
  2. Add a penalty stroke and drop and play a ball in the following manner: determine the spot where the ball crossed the margin of the hazard, stand on that spot facing the pin, and walk a line straight back from the pin (“Back-on-the-line”), keeping the point the ball crossed the margin between you and the pin (you may move as far back as you wish). Drop and play your ball.

#### • Penalty Areas (red stakes/lines)

- Formerly referred to as lateral hazards. You have all the same options as listed above for yellow stakes/lines, but also have a third option should you not find your ball or not wish to play it:
  3. Drop a ball within two club-lengths of where the ball last crossed the penalty area margin, no nearer to the hole.
- NOTE: You cannot take relief from a penalty area unless you are 95% certain your ball is in the penalty area (it is otherwise a “lost ball”).

#### • Ball Lost or Out of Bounds

- A ball is considered lost if it is not found within THREE minutes after you first begin to search.
- A ball is out of bounds when all of it lies beyond the inside line of objects such as white stakes, or a fence or wall that marks the playing area.
- If you think your ball may be lost or out of bounds you may:

- a) (not recommended for HCAA play) - play another ball (provisional ball) from the place where your first ball was played. You must tell your opponent or fellow-competitor that you are playing a provisional ball (before hitting it)

and play it before you look for the first ball. If you cannot find your first ball or if it is out of bounds, you must count the strokes with the first and provisional balls, add a penalty stroke, and play out the hole with the provisional ball. If you find your first ball in bounds, continue play with it and pick up the provisional ball. NOTE: If you play a provisional, you no longer have options b) and c) available to you.

- b) (HCAA local rule and strongly recommended for HCAA play) - estimate the spot where your ball is lost or went out of bounds and then find the nearest fairway edge that is not nearer the hole than the estimated spot. Drop a ball in the fairway within two club-lengths of that fairway edge point or anywhere between there and the estimated spot where your ball is lost or went out of bounds. Add two penalty strokes. OR
- c) "Stroke and distance" - Play another ball from the exact spot you played your last shot. Add one penalty stroke.

#### ● Ball Unplayable

- If your ball is under a tree, in the bushes, or in some other bad situation and you decide you cannot play it, add a penalty stroke and do one of the following:
  1. Go back to where you played the last shot and play a ball from there ("stroke and distance")
  2. Measure two club-lengths from the unplayable lie, no closer to the hole, drop a ball, and play from there
  3. Keep the unplayable lie between where you drop the ball and the hole ("back-on-the-line") and go back as far as you wish on a straight line. Where you decide to hit from is your reference point. Mark the reference point with a tee and drop and play the ball.
- A ball cannot be declared unplayable in a penalty area.