



# DUTIES OF A REFEREE – 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 Referees 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 he sees a player about to break the Rules. The referee is not responsible for a player's wilful breach of the Rules, but he certainly does have an obligation to advise players about the Rules. It would be contrary to the spirit of fair play if a referee failed to inform a player of his rights and obligations under the Rules and then penalised him for a breach that he could have prevented. The referee who tries to help players to avoid breaches of the Rules cannot be accused of favouring one player against the other, since he would act in the same manner towards any player and is, therefore, performing his duties impartially.

The following are examples of actions that a referee may take in order to prevent a breach of the Rules:

- If a player is about to play another ball because the original ball may be lost or out of bounds, ask the player whether it is a provisional 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 his ball ahead of the markers, draw his attention to it before he drives.
- If a player is about to lift a loose impediment in a bunker or water hazard, remind him that his ball is in a hazard.
- If a player is about to adopt or adopts a wrong dropping procedure, call his attention to it and point out the correct procedure.

*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 – a referee should not stand back and watch a player tee their ball from outside the teeing ground
- The referee should not get in the way of the player in, what can be, a restricted area in terms of space

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)
- Ensure the players do not touch their line of putt except as permitted under the Rules
- In match play, make certain whether a putt has been conceded or not. It is advisable for the referee to ask the players to ensure that concessions are made clearly. This may be an additional task undertaken on the first tee.

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, instruct the player to establish and mark his nearest point of relief and the prescribed dropping area.

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.

In addition to the Rules and Local Rules, the referee must be familiar with the Conditions of Competition, which may vary considerably in different tournaments. Particular attention should be paid to any Pace of Play condition to enable the referee to act in accordance with the prescribed procedure, should he be faced with slow play.

**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. For example, it is always useful to know before going forward whether a player's ball is out of bounds or where it last crossed the margin of a water hazard. Similarly, it is important to know whether a ball was still in motion when deflected or stopped by an outside agency (such as a spectator) and, if so, whether the deflection was deliberate or whether the ball had come to rest and was moved by an outside agency. If it was moved when at rest, the observer may know the spot from which it was moved.

When players are in difficulty on opposite sides of the hole it is desirable for the observer to station himself by one of the balls if possible, so that play of each ball can be observed. Preferably, he should watch the ball to be played first, so that he may have the opportunity to resume his normal position ahead of play.

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

### **Refereeing an Area or Zone on Course**

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When a referee is watching play either by chance or through having been assigned to a particular place on the course, their duties are different from those of a referee who is appointed to accompany a group or match.

In match play, unless a referee is assigned to accompany the players throughout a match, he has no authority to intervene in a match other than in relation to Rule 1-3, 6-7 or 33-7. It is a matter for the opponent to decide if he wishes to make a claim (Rule 2-5). The referee's presence on the course is solely to assist players in the event of a claim.

In stroke play the situation is different. Every competitor has a direct interest in the play of all other competitors. Every referee, therefore, has a duty to represent the interest of every competitor in the field. Thus, a referee assigned to a particular area or zone on the course must act on any probable breach of the Rules that he may observe. This may be done by immediately questioning the competitor about his procedure. Also, he will be called upon to make decisions on the course.

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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