

Washington Golf Guidance for Club Competitions During COVID-19 Era



It is not the intended purpose of the below guidance to either encourage or discourage anyone from playing the game, but rather, in our governance role, to help golf course operators, committees and golfers better understand how the Rules of Golf and Rules of Handicapping apply to the various questions we have received. While golf in Washington is subject to safety requirements that are not aligned with the Rules of Golf, this guidance can be used to promote fair and equitable competitions at your club during this time. It is not intended to be used for high-level amateur or professional competitions.

Code of Conduct

The Committee in charge of your competition can introduce a Code of Conduct under Rule 1.2b that restricts competitors from taking actions that are not compliant with social distancing guidelines and penalizes or sanctions players for a breach. Examples that a Committee may want to use include:

- Players are not to touch or remove the flagstick for any reason
- Players are not to stand or walk within 6 feet of one another during the competition
- Players are not to share any equipment (towels, tees, balls, etc.) during the competition
- Players are not to touch another competitors equipment during the competition
- Players are not to share a cart at any time during the competition
- After playing a shot from inside a bunker, players are required to smooth the area to the best of their ability using a foot or golf club

When introducing a Code of Conduct, the Committee should define the penalty for a breach, and subsequent breaches, as well as who will have the final say in determining if a breach has been committed. WA Golf recommends that consideration be given to the fact that many of the actions you may prohibit are instinctual in nature and drafting such a code to restrict only deliberate acts. An example of a penalty structure for Code of Conduct Violations is below:

- First breach of the Code of Conduct – warning or Committee sanction
- Second breach – one-stroke penalty
- Third breach – general penalty
- Fourth breach or any serious misconduct – disqualification

Modifications to the Hole; Not Requiring that Players Hole Out

It is important to note that although the USGA is allowing the use of Most Likely Score for the purpose of applying the Rules of Handicapping when the hole has been modified, they have not modified the Rules of Golf to consider the ball *holed* in these circumstances. The Committee in charge of your competition is responsible for defining when a ball is considered *holed* for the purpose of your competition. Below are examples of language that can be used for various modifications:

- Raised Cup:
 - *A ball is considered holed when it strikes and subsequently comes to rest within [6 inches; 1 foot; 1 club length; etc.] of the raised cup liner.*
- Object Placed in the Cup:
 - *A ball is considered holed when it comes to rest on the [PVC pipe; foam material; etc] placed inside the hole.*

- *A ball is considered holed when it comes to rest on the [PVC pipe; foam material; etc] placed inside the hole or when it strikes the flagstick and subsequently comes to rest within [6 inches; 1 foot; 1 club length; etc.] of the hole.*
- Cup Placed Upside Down in the Hole:
 - *A ball is considered holed when it comes to rest on the hole liner placed upside down in the hole.*
 - *A ball is considered holed when it comes to rest on the hole liner placed upside down in the hole or when it strikes the flagstick and subsequently comes to rest within [6 inches; 1 foot; 1 club length; etc.] of the hole.*

Flagstick

The flagstick serves an important purpose in the game and should be used whenever possible, however, its use is not a requirement within the Rules of Golf. If your Committee decides to not use flagsticks for your competition, it is strongly recommended by WA Golf that you provide competitors with the location of the hole on each green, either through general guidance (front right, middle left, etc.) or via a detailed hole location sheet.

- To restrict players from touching or removing the flagstick, the Committee should prohibit this action on its Code of Conduct.

Alternatively, facilities may choose to use flagsticks that have movable trays, platforms or a similar attachment to help prevent touching the surface of the flagstick to retrieve the ball from the hole. When these devices are used, the ball can be *holed* within the Rules and the Committee no longer needs to define when a ball is *holed*, however, the use of these devices does not conform to the Equipment Rules. Similar to the modification of the hole, these devices should only be used temporarily while safety measures are necessary or required in Washington.

- Rounds played with these devices are acceptable for handicapping purposes temporarily within the United States until otherwise advised by the USGA.

Bunkers and Bunker Rakes

Every course has unique challenges when it comes to bunkers and as a Committee, you will have multiple options for allowing players relief when they enter a bunker without rakes present. If you decide that no additional Rules will be put into effect, WA Golf recommends that you strongly encourage players to smooth the disturbed area of playing the shot or require this action on your Code of Conduct. When you want to grant relief from bunkers you will have multiple options for how to do so:

- Declare all bunkers to be part of the general area:
 - Gives players additional options under Rules 16 and 19 and removes bunker restrictions in Rule 12
 - Example Language: *All areas of sand on the course are part of the general area and are not bunkers.*
- Declare all bunkers to be Ground Under Repair:
 - Gives players free relief outside of the bunker at the nearest point of complete relief
 - Example language: *Ground Under Repair includes all bunkers on the course.*
- Declare all disturbed area in bunkers to be Ground Under Repair:
 - Gives players free relief from disturbed areas in bunkers at the nearest point of complete relief or point of maximum available relief inside the bunker
 - Example language: *Ground Under Repair includes all disturbed areas of sand within bunkers.*

Scorecards and Scoring

The Rules allow for scores to be accepted and certified without requiring a physical signature or scorecard. It is important that the Committee clearly defines when a scorecard has been returned and verified and that both the player and the marker have the opportunity to certify the returned score. WA Golf recommends that you use one of the various methods available to accept scores digitally or by having players communicate scores verbally to the Committee after their round. Below are different options you may use to accept and verify scores in your competition.

- Accepting scores from players via USGA Tournament Management or other electronic software:
 - The Premium Version of USGA Tournament Management, as well as other tournament software, allows scores to be submitted electronically through an app or website. The marker can submit scores and the player can be given a reasonable amount of time to review the scores online and contact the Committee if there is a discrepancy.
 - The Committee may also set up a website or use Google Forms to allow the submission of scores. The marker can submit the score and the Committee can then send to the player for verification.
 - Example language: *All scores must be submitted by the marker to the Committee using [USGA TM, Committee website, Google Forms, etc.]. Scorecards will be considered returned and certified when the player has the opportunity to review and send confirmation to the Committee.*
- Accepting scores from players via email, text, etc.
 - The Committee may accept scores via email, text or similar method where the marker sends a communication to both the Committee and the player they are marking for with the hole-by-hole scores. The player can then respond to verify the accuracy.
 - The same method can be used with the marker instead sending a photo of a completed physical scorecard.
 - Example language: *All scores must be submitted by the marker to both the player and the Committee by [email, text message, etc.]. Scorecards will be considered returned and certified when the player responds with confirmation.*
- Accepting scores verbally
 - If physical scorecards are preferred, the Committee may choose to have players verbally communicate scores in the scoring area rather than exchange scorecards.
 - Verbal confirmation can be substituted for the physical signature
 - The Committee should clearly define when a scorecard has been returned
 - Example language: *All players must report to the scoring area immediately following the round. Scores will be accepted verbally by the Committee in the presence of both the marker and the player. Scorecards will be considered returned and certified when the player leaves the scoring area.*

Questions? Contact the WA Golf Handicapping Department

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