

Just when you think you have the Rules of Golf figured out ...

By
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Besides being a tremendous championship, this year's Masters proved yet again that golf is, by far, the most exasperatingly frustrating, evil trick that the Scots have plagued upon us for nearly five centuries ... and we love it!

Mr. Maggert, let me be another among many to apologize for the golf gods' behavior on "Masters Sunday." To take such a fine professional as yourself and shape him like *Silly Putty* to mirror a hacker such as myself, is not just unfair, it's downright rude.

On the third hole (the shortest

par-4 on the course I might add), Maggert ran into, or should I say was run over by, Rule 19-2b (*Ball in Motion Deflected by the Player in Stroke Play*): "If a competitor's ball is accidentally deflected or stopped by himself, his partner or either of their caddies or equipment, the competitor shall incur a penalty of two strokes. The ball shall be played as it lies, except when it comes to rest in or on the competitor's his partner's or either of their caddies' clothes or equipment . . ."

When Maggert attempted to extricate himself from a fairway bunker, the ball caught the lip and careened straight back into his chest. Besides leaving a small bruise, Maggert incurred a two-stroke penalty, an even bigger bruise on the scorecard.

"It was a very strange day," Maggert would say to reporters later. Indeed. But strange things and golf are a common pairing.

I remember a telephone call I

received at the USGA from a woman who struck her ball toward a band of trees. (*Disclaimer: this is absolutely true; please strap yourself to whatever you are sitting on.*) Seems simple enough, I thought; just go find it.

After three minutes or so, she was just about to give up when she felt a thump on the back of her head. Her ball had been blown from its precarious perch atop the trees and fallen on top of her head. As wind and gravity are not considered outside agencies under *The Rules of Golf*, the motion of the ball was simply a continuation of the stroke. Thus, the poor woman was also run over by Rule 19-2b and incurred a two-stroke penalty.

Why in the world does Rule 19-2b have such a stiff penalty you ask? Why do dogs and trees have a bark? Why do we drive on a parkway and park on a driveway? The Rule makers have struggled with this one since the dawn of the game. Ultimately, the Rule differentiates what is intentional and what is accidental by simply penalizing the player generally for an accident and disqualifying the player for an intentional deflection. It takes some of the mystery out of it. I can live with that.

A final note: this weekend, I was playing a heated match with a whole soda on the line for the winner. On the 13th hole I was attempting to play a simple putt from the fringe when the golf gods had some fun at my expense. I struck the ball straight into the ground and it popped straight up so that I could strike it a second time (Anyone ever heard of T.C. Chen?). Rule 14-4 tells me that when I strike the ball more than once during the course of a stroke, I must count the stroke and add a penalty stroke, making two strokes in all. Great.

"It was a very strange day," Biernacki said to reporters later.

Prior to joining the SCGA, Steve Biernacki worked in the Rules and Competitions department of the USGA in Far Hills, NJ.

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