

The Rules of Golf and Conditions of Competitions: both are important

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When golf fans learned that Retief Goosen had been disqualified from the Nissan Open before even hitting a shot, reaction ranged from puzzlement to disbelief. Goosen was disqualified because he missed his starting time in the Pro-Am the day before the actual tournament, which broaches a PGA Tour *Condition of Competition*.

Conditions of Competition derive their authority from *The Rules of Golf*. Rule 33-1 begins: "The Committee must establish the conditions under which a competition is to be played." It continues: "The Committee has no power to waive a Rule of Golf." For example, The Committee must not adopt a rule allowing the use of electronic range finders because that violates Rule 14-3.

Both *The Rules of Golf* and *Conditions of Competition* are important elements in any tournament. Many of the complaints we receive at the SCGA regarding club tournaments can be traced to poor or even nonexistent *Conditions of Competition* for the tournament in question.

The *Conditions of Competition* are the basic rules under which a particular competition is conducted. For example, is the competition being conducted at scratch or net? If it's a scratch tournament, is there an upper index limit for player entries? If it's a net event, the *Conditions of Competition* should state whether the course handicaps will be figured on Current Index or Low Index and which month(s) will be used to make the calculation.

Conditions of Competition are particularly important to clarify

options to *The Rules of Golf*. For example, Rule 6-3 states that if a player is late to the tee, he is disqualified. However, the note to that rule and Appendix I allow The Committee to modify the penalty to two strokes in stroke play or loss of hole in match play in the event the player arrives within five minutes of his starting time. However, for that note to be in effect in a particular competition, The Committee must make that determination and list it in the *Conditions of Competitions*.

A similar instance comes with the so-called *One-Ball Rule*. Under Rule 5-1 of *The Rules of Golf*, players

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are required only to use a ball that conforms to the specifications in Appendix III of *The Rules of Golf*. However, many important scratch competitions, including SCGA and USGA championships, adopt the local rule in Appendix I which requires players to use only balls of the same make and type. Again, for this Local Rule to be in effect, it needs to be listed in the *Conditions of Competition*.

Another important *Condition of Competition* relates to the conclusion of the tournament. Players should know, in advance of the tournament, whether and how ties will be broken. For example, in most SCGA net events, we declare co-champions in the event of a tie for first place. In SCGA scratch events, we play off for first place. Both of those procedures are announced ahead of time in the *Conditions of Competitions*. When discussing a potential playoff, the nature of the playoff — i.e., hole-by-hole, three-hole, etc. — is usually specified by the SCGA Tournament Committee.

In addition to *Conditions of Competition*, the SCGA adopts specific *Local Rules* for each competi-

tion. Some of these *Local Rules* are listed along with the permanent *Conditions of Competition*, while others are adopted for a specific course. For example, flower beds are prominent on many local courses. In some case, we play these areas as through the green; at other times, they may be treated as ground under repair. Either way, it's important to provide contestants with that information ahead of time.

If a course marks an area of the golf course as a lateral hazard when that area doesn't merit such a definition under the *Rules of Golf*, the SCGA will play that area in conformance with *The Rules of Golf* and note that on the *Local Rules* distributed to the players. (If your club management is unsure as to whether your course is marked correctly, the SCGA will be happy to assist you in properly marking the course. This is a free service provided to SCGA member clubs).

Some *Local Rules* seem simple, but can become complicated. The SCGA prefers to use red stakes, red lines or (as a last resort) red irrigation flags to define lateral water hazards and yellow stakes, lines and/or irrigation flags to define water hazards. Our *Local Rules* reads: "When both stakes and lines are used to define water and lateral water hazards, stakes identify hazards and lines define margins."

Issuing *Conditions of Competition* and *Local Rules* ahead of time helps prevent problems on the golf course or disputes during the tournament. Players — whether in SCGA championships or a club event — are responsible for knowing the *Conditions of Competition* and *Local Rules* just as they are responsible for knowing *The Rules of Golf*. However, they can't know what they aren't told, so The Committee has the responsibility for (a) considering carefully and in advance what *Conditions* and *Local Rules* to adopt and (b) distributing them to players as far in advance of the tournament as is practical.