

## A day at the beach: bunker basics

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**F**or most Southern Californians, a day at the beach is full of surf, sand, and fun in the sun. For most amateur golfers, however, a day at the beach can be intimidating and frustrating, and usually leads to a few additional strokes on your scorecard. Whether we like it or not, bunkers are an integral part of the game and we usually find ourselves visiting the sand a few times per round. Therefore it's important to know what you can and can't do under the *Rules of Golf* when your ball lies in a bunker.

Let's focus first on the basics. Had Michelle Wie known the basics under the Rules a little better, she could have avoided her second penalty of her professional career. Wie breached Rule 13-4 (*Ball in Hazard; Prohibited Actions*) in the Women's British Open when she touched a loose impediment (a piece of moss) on her backswing in a greenside bunker.

The basics of what you can and can't do in a bunker fall under Rule 13-4, *Ball in Hazard; Prohibited Actions*. Rule 13-4a states that before making a stroke at a ball in a bunker a player may not test the condition of the bunker. What constitutes testing? Examples include raking the bunker prior to making a stroke from the bunker; if your home club leaves rakes inside bunkers, proceed with caution when removing the rakes prior to playing. I've seen many players hit a ball into a bunker, walk into the bunker to grab the rake and rake their footprints over to where their ball lay. While that saves time, it's also a breach of the Rules because the player is considered to have tested the condition of the bunker.

Another common breach of testing is when players take a stance in the bunker either directly behind or some distance from where their ball lies to simulate their next stroke (Decision 13-4/25). When your ball

lies in a bunker you are only allowed to take your stance where you would address your ball.

Rule 13-4b states that, before making a stroke from a bunker, a player is not allowed to touch the ground in the bunker with his hand or club. This includes leaning on your club while waiting to play (Decision 13-4/2), touching sand while making your backswing (Decision 13-4/31) or grounding your club when taking your stance. This rule is generally well known by golfers as most are taught from a young age not to touch the ground in a hazard with their hand or club. There are some exceptions to this rule for obvious and logical reason, which include touching the ground as a result of or to prevent falling, in removing an obstruction (such as a rake), in measuring or retrieving, lifting, placing or replacing a ball under any Rule or placing clubs in a bunker (yes, you just read that correctly, you can take your clubs into and place them down in the bunker).

Rule 13-4c states that before making a stroke from a bunker a player is not allowed to touch or move a loose impediment lying in or touching the bunker. Loose impediment are natural objects such as, stones, leaves, twigs, pine cones and the like that are not fixed, growing or solidly embedded in the ground. If these objects are fixed, growing or solidly embedded they are not considered loose impediments.

You are also not allowed to remove loose impediments that lie in the same bunker as your ball even if they are nowhere close to your ball. What happens if you touch loose impediments by standing on them? Decision 13-4/13.5 guides us on this scenario stating there is no

penalty provided the lie of the ball or the area of intended swing was not improved.

Here are a few additional things you can do under Rule 13-4. After making a stroke from a bunker, the player or his caddie may rake or smooth sand provided that nothing is done that improves the lie of the ball or assists the player in the subsequent play of the hole. There are also certain things in a bunker that a player may touch with a club or otherwise including any obstruction (rake, wooden steps, drainage pipe, etc.); anything declared by the Committee to be an integral part of the course; or any grass, bush, tree or growing thing. So while you can't touch the ground, sand or loose impediments in a bunker you are allowed to touch grass or other growing things in a bunker; had the moss that Michelle Wie touched been growing, she would have not incurred a penalty.

The penalty for a breach of Rule 13-4a, b or c is two strokes in stroke play or loss of hole in match play. So proceed with caution when your ball lies in a bunker. Examine your lie and the objects around your stance, area of swing and lie of ball as touching or moving these objects or grounding your club could cost you some unwanted strokes.

One other point about Michelle Wie: When asked if she was going to brush up on the Rules of Golf by studying them a little more closely she replied, "Well, they're not actually great reading material." With that endorsement I don't anticipate *Rules of Golf* books flying off the shelves anytime soon, but the fact remains that — great reading material or not — knowing the Rules is an integral part of playing the game.

### Three Fall Rules of Golf seminars planned

The SCGA Rules and Competitions Department will conduct Rules of Golf seminars open to the public on October 25 at Virginia CC, November 28 at Pala Mesa Resort and December 7 at Moorpark CC. The seminars run from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. and are conducted by the SCGA R & C staff. Online registration will begin in early September on the SCGA Web site. Space is limited at each site. For details, long onto:

