



## #RulesToTheMax

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If you were paying attention to the WM Phoenix Open a couple weeks ago, surely you heard about Charley Hoffman's harsh criticism of the PGA TOUR, the USGA, and the Tour's rules officials after Hoffman ended up with two separate penalty strokes while taking relief from a red penalty area. The purpose of this article is not to comment on Hoffman's criticisms (that's what social media is for – you should have no problem finding that type of discussion if that's what you're looking for!). However, Hoffman's adventures on the 13th hole at the TPC Scottsdale did involve several Rules of Golf, at least one of which he admittedly didn't understand. As such, let's inspect each step in Hoffman's relief procedure that ended with him incurring one more penalty stroke than he expected. Perhaps understanding these Rules a little better can help you stay out of the kind of trouble that Hoffman experienced in Phoenix!

It all started when Hoffman hit his drive into a red penalty area on the 13th hole of round two.

Of the three relief options available to him, Charley chose the lateral option (drop within two club-lengths from the point of entry). Having chosen this location to take relief, it turned out that Hoffman's relief area was on a fairly steep slope, and this is what caused his relief procedure to be a bit more complicated than just dropping and playing away. When Hoffman dropped the ball into the relief area, it rolled down the slope and back into the water. As they typically do, the Rules tell us what to do when this happens. Rule 14.3c(2)'s title is right on the money: "What to Do if Ball Dropped in Right Way Comes to Rest Outside Relief Area." This Rule first tells us to try again: drop a ball a second time, and see if it will stay in the relief area. Hoffman's ball didn't stay, so he moved along to step

#3: place a ball on the spot that the second dropped ball first touched the ground. He did this, the ball stayed put, and it was now in play and in the right place. Woohoo!

Well, maybe not woohoo. After putting his ball correctly into play as described above, the ball rolled down the slope and back into the water in the penalty area!

Now, in order to figure out what to do next, we need to determine what caused this ball at rest to begin moving. According to the Rules, there are only four possible things that can ever cause a ball at rest to move, and the procedures for continuing play can be different depending on which one caused the movement. The four possible causes are: the player, the opponent in match play, an outside influence, and natural forces. It's best to run through all four possibilities in this order, since the first three require virtual certainty (95% certainty) to proceed under the applicable Rule. Only natural forces do not require this level of certainty. Similarly, for a ball in the general area, a ball must be replaced when it's moved by any of the first three causes, but it must be played from its new position if it's moved by natural forces.

So let's get back to Charley Hoffman's situation, and figure out how to move forward. Are we 95% sure that the ball was moved by Hoffman, the player? No, so we can not replace the ball under that Rule. Are we 95% sure that the ball was moved by Hoffman's opponent? No, because there are no opponents in stroke play. Are we 95% sure that the ball was moved by an outside influence? No, so we can not replace the ball under that Rule either. Now, by process of elimination, we're just left with natural forces (in this case gravity, maybe helped by a bit of wind). And when a ball is moved by natural forces, the player is now required to play from its new place. Unfortunately for Hoffman, that new place was back in the water inside the penalty area.

What this meant for Hoffman was that he had to take relief from the penalty area again, for an additional penalty of one stroke. It's unfortunate that it went this way for Hoffman, but it illustrates the importance of examining all of your options when you find yourself taking relief from penalty areas. When your lateral option seems high-risk for something like this to happen, does it make sense to use the back-on-the-line option instead? Or even stroke and distance? You may end up further from the hole, but in some situations it makes sense to play it safe so you don't end up with double the penalty like Charley Hoffman did. At the end of the day, it's up to the player to decide if the risk is worth it, but whatever the final decision, it's always wise to take a look at every one of your options before you drop your ball.

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