



#RulesToThe Max

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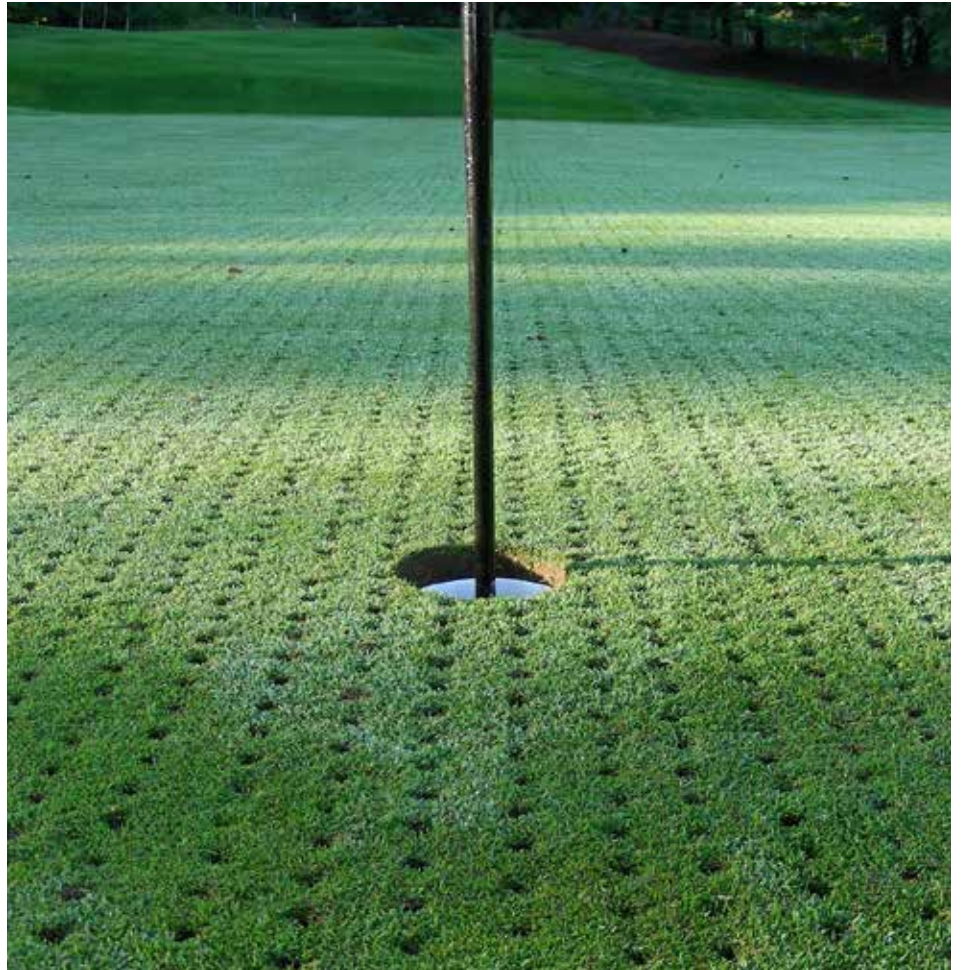
As golf is an outdoor game, some of the challenges we find on the course have a tendency to change with the seasons. The springtime rains can leave us with temporary water and washed out bunkers, the summer heat can dry out the course and burn out the grass, and in the fall we're faced with added debris and the fall-out from routine maintenance practices. As such, the leaf-covered ground and aeration holes can cause us more difficulty than usual, but not to worry: the Rules, as usual, are here to help.

Let's start by dealing with the falling leaves that are so familiar this time of year in New England. Most grounds crews are keeping very busy blowing and raking the leaves, to be removed from playable areas of the course. As this is an ongoing process, you'll likely find piles of leaves on the golf course, which could

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interfere with play. Fortunately, golfers have some recourse under the Rules if they happen to face interference from these piles of leaves. The Definition of Ground Under Repair explains that “grass cuttings, leaves, and any other material piled for later removal” are automatically ground under repair, even if they’re not marked as such. Therefore, players are entitled to relief from the leaf piles if they experience interference. However, the Definition follows up with the caveat that “any materials left on the course that are not intended to be removed are not ground under repair unless the Committee defines them as such.” So it would be good practice as a professional to find out what the maintenance crew plans to do with the piles, so that you can make the most accurate rulings possible for your members.

But what if the maintenance crew is unable to keep up with the falling leaves, and you’re experiencing problematic areas where the leaves are collecting and causing trouble for your players? There’s an optional Local Rule to help with that as well. Model Rule F-14 tells us that “At certain times of the year, piles of loose impediments such as leaves, seeds, or acorns may make it difficult for a player to find his or her ball. A Committee can choose to treat such piles of loose impediments in the general area or in a bunker as ground under repair from which free relief is allowed under Rule 16.1.” If you’d like to put that Local Rule into place for the fall, the



USGA recommends the following language: “During play of [specify hole number], any ground with temporary accumulations of [identify types of loose impediments] in the general area or in a bunker is treated as ground under repair from which free relief is allowed under Rule 16.1.

Finally, a friendly reminder about aeration holes, since there’s a lot of confusion on the subject: players do not automatically get relief from aeration holes, and are not allowed to repair them on the putting green! The best available recourse is instituting Model Local Rule E-4: “if a player’s ball lies in or touches an aeration hole [in the general area], the player may take relief under Rule 16.1b. If the ball comes to rest in another aeration hole, the player may take relief again under this Local Rule. [On the putting green], the player may take relief under Rule 16.1d. But interference does not exist if the aeration hole only interferes with the player’s stance or, on the putting green, on the player’s line of play.”