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SOMETIMES, THE RULES CAN STING #RulesToTheMax

by Max Doctoroff, PGA

It's been great to see so many of you over the last month or so, with the Section Championship, Senior Championship, and several other significant events being contested in such a short period of time. As it turns out, when the busy season hits and we all spend more time on the golf course, we find that certain occurrences on the golf course are more common than we thought! In this vein, I'd like to discuss a Rule of Golf that I thought was somewhat obscure, but it turned out that I had three separate rulings about it in the past few weeks. In each case, this Rule caused some confusion for the players and in all cases, the players didn't get the answer they were hoping for. As the title says, sometimes, the rules can sting.

It must be the time of year that has caused this situation to come up so often, but at several courses in recent weeks, players have encountered colonies of bees nesting in bunkers. As we all know, bees can be dangerous when they're inclined to sting people,

especially to someone who's allergic to them. Not to worry, because the Rules afford us relief from dangerous animal conditions, right? Well sure, but not always the degree of relief that we might want.

When considering this Rule, we first need to determine if we get relief at all. Rule 16.2a gives a list of examples of dangerous animal conditions that would allow relief, which includes poisonous snakes, stinging bees, alligators, fire ants, and bears. So by the letter of the Rule, a player whose ball is dangerously near a bees nest would clearly get relief from the situation. How much relief you get, however, depends on where your ball lies.

If your ball is in the general area, you're in luck. In this case, you may take a drop within one club length of the nearest point of complete relief from the situation, no closer to the hole. In almost every case in the general area, you could find a place to drop that's

completely clear of the dangerous animal condition. However, in the cases we've been encountering of bees nesting in bunkers, the player's ball has been in the bunker as well, and in a bunker, your allowable relief from the situation is more limited. While you still get relief from the situation, your only option for free relief is to drop the ball in the bunker. Given the small size of bunkers and the nature of swarming bees, complete relief is often impossible to find within the bunker. When this is the case, unfortunately you're still stuck dealing with the same swarm of bees you started with, and the Rules don't offer any more help for free. This is one of those cases when the Rules give you free relief, but they don't give you good relief.

However, there is another option that I've found most players aren't aware of: when taking relief from a dangerous animal condition (or an abnormal course condition for that matter) in a bunker, you can choose to pay one penalty stroke to take your ball outside the bunker and drop it back on a line, keeping the spot of the original ball between you and the hole. While nobody likes taking penalty strokes, it may be a better option than playing your shot from the middle of a swarm of bees. On the bright side, it's a better option than taking an unplayable ball penalty, which charges you two penalty strokes to take the ball back on a line outside the bunker.

Important to note (as I'm sure you've been asked the question once or twice by your members), while you do get relief from dangerous animal conditions, you are not entitled to relief from dangerous course conditions, such as poison ivy. Interpretation 16.2a/1 tells us "if a player's ball comes to rest in a spot where the player has interference from a plant or bush that could cause physical harm, such as poison ivy or a cactus, while the player may be faced with challenging circumstances or may be allergic to a given plant, he or she is not entitled to free relief under the Rules."

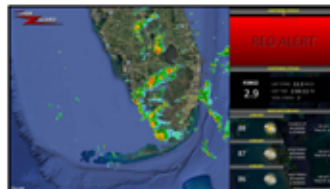
For more information on how to take relief from dangerous animal conditions in penalty areas or on the putting green, please refer to Rule 16.2b. Thanks for reading, and be safe out there!



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