

## Order of Play in Match Play

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Although most collegiate golf is played in a stroke play format with both team and individual competitions, there are several important events conducted at match play including the Palmer Cup and the Walker Cup. And then there is the U. S. Amateur together with the various state amateur championships, most of which feature match play and are open to college players, so it is important for the college player to know the differences between the Rules governing match and stroke play.

One of the major differences is the required order of play during play of a hole. In stroke play, it is common for players to simply play “ready golf,” with the players playing in whatever order they see fit to do so. In match play, after both players have started play of a hole, the Rules state that the ball farther from the hole is played first. If a player plays when his opponent should have played, there is no penalty, but the opponent may immediately require the player to cancel the stroke so made and, in correct order, play a ball as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was last played. The players have no option to do otherwise. In fact, if they agree during the round to play in other than the required order, they are subject to immediate disqualification if they were aware of the Rule and agreed not to follow it.

At the highest level of amateur golf, match play is most often conducted with a referee present who will always insist on the players following the Rules, including order of play. When a referee is present, the players should consult with the referee about a specific order of play situation to avoid disagreements and facilitate the smooth conduct of the match.

While most of the questions about order of play are simply a settlement of the issue of which ball lies farther from the hole, occasionally some interesting variations arise. Suppose that both players play their balls into a water hazard where the location of both balls is known. Would the order of play be referenced to the relative positions of where the original balls lie in the water hazard or the relative positions of where the players take relief? The answer is that the order of play is based on the relative positions of the balls in the hazard. If both of the two balls in the water hazard were lost in the same general area of the water hazard, and therefore it is not known which ball is farther from the hole, the player to play first would be decided by lot.

Another set of situations is covered by the Note to the Rule governing order of play in match play (Rule 10-1b). These are those cases when it becomes known that the original ball is not to be played as it lies and the player is required to play a ball as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was last played. In these cases, the order of play is determined by the spot from which the previous stroke was made. When a ball may be played from a spot other than where the previous stroke was made, the order of play is determined by the position where the original ball came to rest. This latter situation would arise where the player

determines that his ball is unplayable and he may play from one of those several spots, although he is not required to play from the spot of the previous stroke.

This Note evolved from a situation that occurred in the 2003 Walker Cup at Ganton Golf Club in England involving Americans Bill Haas of Wake Forest University and Tripp Kuehne of Oklahoma State University, playing in a foursome match against the side from Great Britain and Ireland (GBI). Kuehne struck his tee shot well to the left and much longer than the tee shot of the GBI player that found a fairway bunker on the right. It appeared that the GBI side would play first as their ball was much farther from the hole than where Kuehne had played his ball. After the GBI side had played from the bunker and another shot as well, it happened that Kuehne could not find his ball and thus the American side was required to play again from the tee. The question arose as to whether the GBI side had played out of turn since Haas would be playing from the tee and his ball would be played from a spot much farther from the hole than where the GBI side had played in the fairway bunker. If it had been determined that the GBI side had played out of turn, the American side could have recalled their stroke(s). A complicating factor was that the American side was unaware that the GBI side had played while the Americans were searching for Kuehne's ball. The referee made the determination that the GBI side had not played out of turn and the Note was written to support this decision and included into the Rules of Golf in 2004 as it stands today.

The key point to remember from the Walker Cup situation is that when the GBI team played their second stroke, it was not known that the American team would be required to play from the spot where their previous stroke was made. Thus, the order of play was determined by the relative positions of the original balls when the stroke was made, that is, where the original tee shots had come to rest even though one of the balls was not found.

Order of play is integral to match play strategy and that is why the Rules are formulated as they are.