

## **MUST OR MAY A MOVED OR LIFTED LOOSE IMPEDIMENT BE REPLACED?**

In the first paragraph of Rule 23-1 relating to loose impediments, the words are quite clear, “Except when both the *loose impediment* and the ball lie in or touch the same *hazard*, any *loose impediment* may be removed without penalty.”

However, the question often arises in some situations (i) whether a loose impediment must be replaced if it is moved when a player proceeds under a Rule permitting lifting a ball or some other activity such as smoothing a bunker in care of the course or (ii) if a penalty can be avoided if a moved loose impediment is replaced after it has been moved or lifted. There is no guidance in Rule 23-1 but there are several Decisions relating to these questions and they are listed below without comment but must be learned in order to correctly provide the answers.

### **Loose Impediment Moved in Process of Ball Being Lifted or After Ball Lifted**

#### **Decision 23-1/7 Loose Impediment in Hazard Moved in Process of Ball Being Lifted**

**Q.** A loose impediment in a hazard close to a player’s ball in the same hazard is moved in the process of the player lifting his ball under a Rule that requires him to replace the ball. Is the player required to replace the loose impediment before making his next stroke?

**A.** Yes. If he fails to do so, in equity (Rule 1-4), the player loses the hole in match play or incurs a penalty of two strokes in stroke play on the basis that failing to do so, in effect, circumvents Rule 13-4c. (Revised)

#### **Decision 23-1/7.5 Loose Impediment Through the Green Moved When Ball Moved or in Process of Ball Being Lifted**

**Q.** A loose impediment close to a player’s ball lying through the green is moved when (a) the ball is moved in circumstances where a Rule requires the ball to be replaced, or (b) the ball is in the process of being lifted under a Rule that requires

the ball to be replaced. The loose impediment was in such a position that it is likely that the player's ball would have moved if the loose impediment had been removed first. Should the player be required to replace the loose impediment prior to making his next stroke?

**A. No**, in such circumstances, the player is not required to replace the loose impediment. (New)

### **Decision 23-1/8 Removal of Loose Impediments Likely to Cause Ball to Move; Loose Impediments Removed Before Ball Replaced**

**Q.** A player's ball lies through the green against a detached tree branch and on a bed of pine needles. It appears likely that the ball will move if the player removes either the tree branch or the pine needles.

The player then lifts the ball, or the ball is moved, under a Rule that requires it to be replaced. Before replacing the ball on the spot from which it was lifted or moved, the player removes the tree branch or the pine needles on which his ball lay. Is this permissible?

**A. No.** Under Rule 18-2, through the green a player incurs a penalty if he causes his ball to move as a result of removing a loose impediment. It would circumvent this Rule if, before a moved or lifted ball was replaced on the spot from which it was lifted or moved, it was permissible to remove loose impediments the removal of which otherwise would likely have caused the ball to move. Therefore, in equity (Rule 1-4), the player should be penalized one stroke.

In such circumstances, if a player wishes to remove the loose impediments, he should do so either before lifting the ball or after replacing the moved or lifted ball. If his ball then moves as a result of removing the loose impediments, the player incurs a penalty stroke under Rule 18-2 and must replace the ball.

This Decision does not apply where the player must proceed by dropping the ball under Rule 20-3c because it is impossible to determine the spot on which the ball is to be replaced; in that situation, Decision 23-1/6 applies and the player is permitted to remove any loose impediments from the area in which he is preparing to drop his ball as near as possible to where it lay. (Revised)

## Use or Removal of Obstruction Causes a Loose Impediment to Move

### Decision 1-4/5 Removal of Obstruction in Hazard Would Move Loose Impediment

**Q.** In a hazard, a player's ball lies against a movable obstruction. A loose impediment lies on top of the obstruction in such a position that the player cannot remove the obstruction without also moving the loose impediment. The player is entitled to move the movable obstruction under Rule 24-1 but is not entitled to move the loose impediment under Rule 23. What is the procedure?

**A.** The player may remove the obstruction as authorized by Rule 24-1. As the loose impediment will be moved in the process, in equity (Rule 1-4), the player incurs no penalty and must place the loose impediment as near as possible to the spot where it originally lay. If the player fails to place the loose impediment as required, in equity (Rule 1-4) and in view of the purpose of Rule 13-4, he would lose the hole in match play or incur a penalty of two strokes in stroke play.

### Decision 13-4/9.5 Loose Impediment in Bunker Moved When Player Smooths Sand in Bunker for Sole Purpose of Caring for Course

**Q.** A player's ball lies in a bunker. The player picks up a rake that is lying ten yards behind his ball and, solely for the purpose of caring for the course, smooths his footprints as he walks towards his ball. While raking his footprints, he also moves a loose impediment in the bunker. Is the player in breach of Rule 13-4c?

**A.** When a player's ball lies in a bunker, Exception 2 to Rule 13-4 allows a player to smooth sand in the bunker for the sole purpose of caring for the course provided nothing is done to breach Rule 13-2 with respect to his next stroke. Therefore, there is no breach of Rule 13-4c provided that (a) the movement of the loose impediment is incidental to the act permitted by the Rules (i.e., the raking of the footprints), and (b) the lie of the ball, area of intended stance or swing or line of play is not improved by moving the loose impediment. The player is not required to replace the loose impediment so moved.

## **Opponent or Fellow-Competitor Moves or Lifts a Loose Impediment**

### **Decision 20-3b/8 Loose Impediment Affecting Lie of Ball Moved**

**Q.** A's ball lies in a bunker, with a loose impediment immediately behind the ball. The ball of B, his opponent or fellow-competitor, lies near A's ball in the same bunker, but farther from the hole. B asks A to lift his ball under Rule 22-2, which A does. B's stroke moves the loose impediment that was behind A's ball. Is A's lie considered to have been altered as a result of the removal of the loose impediment, in which case Rule 20-3b would apply?

**A.** No. Although the loose impediment may have affected the lie of A's ball, loose impediments are not part of the lie of the ball as contemplated by Rule 20-3b. Therefore, A is not required to replace the loose impediment before his next stroke. If he did replace the loose impediment, there would be no penalty.

The same answer would apply on any part of the course.

### **Decision 23-1/10 Removal of Loose Impediments Affecting Player's Play**

**Q.** A player with a downhill putt picks up loose impediments between his ball and the hole but leaves some behind the hole. An opponent or fellow-competitor removes loose impediments behind the hole that might have served as a backstop for the player's ball. What is the ruling?

**A.** In equity (Rule 1-4), the player is entitled, but not required, to replace the loose impediments.

The opponent or fellow-competitor is permitted to remove the loose impediments by Rule 23-1, and accordingly he is not in breach of Rule 1-2 (see Exception 1 to Rule 1-2). However, if the opponent or fellow-competitor has refused to comply with a request from the player not to remove the loose impediments, the opponent loses the hole (see Decision 2/3) or the fellow-competitor is disqualified (Rule 3-4) for intentionally denying the player's right to have the loose impediments left in position.

The same principles apply to the removal of a movable obstruction in similar circumstances.