NOBODY CARES
ABOUT YOUR SWING

BUT THE RULES STILL APPLY!

A pocket guide to 12 common golf rules

With a few words from Holly (of course).

By Holly Spellman

A companion to the 52-Week Golf Comedy Planner

1. PLAY IT AS IT LIES

GOLFER: My ball is behind a tree. Can I move it a few inches?

HOLLY: Only if a rule lets you. The tree doesn't negotiate!

THE RULE: Generally play the ball as it lies. If relief is available, follow the applicable procedure; some relief options carry a penalty.

2. OUT OF BOUNDS

GOLFER: My ball went over the fence. Can I drop one here?

HOLLY: Wishful thinking isn't a local rule!

THE RULE: Usually take stroke-and-distance relief: add one penalty stroke and play again from the previous spot. Some courses adopt a local-rule alternative.

3. LOST BALL

GOLFER: How long can I look for my ball?

HOLLY: Three minutes. Not until sunset!

THE RULE: A ball is lost if not found within three minutes after the player or caddie begins searching. Usually proceed under stroke and distance.

4. PROVISIONAL BALL

GOLFER: My ball might be lost in the woods. Hit another?

HOLLY: Yes, but say 'provisional' first!

THE RULE: If your ball may be lost outside a penalty area or out of bounds, announce and play a provisional before going forward to search.

5. PENALTY AREAS

GOLFER: My ball went in the pond. Do I have to swim?

HOLLY: Only if you're looking for an excuse to stop playing!

THE RULE: Red and yellow penalty areas allow specified relief options for one penalty stroke. Red areas also allow lateral relief.

6. BUNKER RULES

GOLFER: Can I test the sand with my club?

HOLLY: Admire it, yes. Conduct a soil analysis, no!

THE RULE: Do not deliberately test the sand with a hand, club, or other object, or touch sand with your club immediately in front of or behind your ball before the stroke. Other restrictions apply.

7. UNPLAYABLE BALL

GOLFER: My ball is stuck in a bush. Now what?

HOLLY: Declare it unplayable. The bush doesn't get a vote!

THE RULE: Except in a penalty area, you may take unplayable-ball relief, generally for one penalty stroke. Bunker options have special restrictions.

8. CART PATHS

GOLFER: Do I have to hit my ball off the pavement?

HOLLY: Not unless you're auditioning as a spark plug!

THE RULE: Free relief is generally available from an immovable cart path interfering with lie, stance, or intended swing, subject to the rule's conditions.

9. MARKING YOUR BALL

GOLFER: Can I pick up my ball on the green to clean it?

HOLLY: Sure. Mark it first. This isn't hide-and-seek!

THE RULE: On the putting green, mark the ball's position before lifting it; you may clean it, then replace it on its original spot.

10. THE FLAGSTICK

GOLFER: Do I have to take the flagstick out to putt?

HOLLY: No. But don't expect it to catch your ball!

THE RULE: You may leave the flagstick in the hole when putting. There is normally no penalty if your ball strikes a flagstick properly left in the hole.

11. DROPPING A BALL

GOLFER: Can I just toss my ball over there?

HOLLY: If you're playing basketball! Golf says knee height.

THE RULE: When relief requires a drop, drop from knee height so the ball lands in and comes to rest in the required relief area.

12. REPAIRING THE GREEN

GOLFER: Can I fix these spike marks before putting?

HOLLY: Please do! The greenkeeper might thank you.

THE RULE: You may repair most damage on the putting green, including ball marks and spike marks, without improving the surface beyond restoring it.

ONE LAST GOLF TRUTH...

The only thing consistent in golf is inconsistency.

Know the rules. Play the game. Keep laughing.

— Holly

QUICK REMINDER

These are simplified summaries, not the complete Rules of Golf. Check the official USGA/R&A Rules and the course's local rules for full details.