

Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

19. Relief for an Embedded Ball

Current Rule: In certain circumstances, a player is allowed to take relief when his or her ball is embedded in its own pitch-mark:

- Rule 25-2 allows relief only when a ball is embedded in a closely-mown area (that is, an area cut to fairway height or less) that is through the green.
- But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule that extends this relief to a ball embedded anywhere through the green, whether or not in a closely-mown area (except when embedded in sand).
- In taking relief, the player must drop the original ball as near as possible to where it was embedded and not nearer the hole.

2019 Rule: The current default position in the Rules will be reversed:

- Rule 16.3 will allow relief for a ball embedded anywhere in the “general area” (that is, the area currently known as “through the green”), except when embedded in sand.
- But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule restricting relief to a ball embedded in those parts of the general area cut to fairway height or less.
- In taking relief, the player will drop the original ball or a substituted ball within one club-length of (but not nearer the hole than) the spot right behind where the ball was embedded.

Reasons for Change:

- This is an appropriate exception to the principle of playing the ball as it lies because having to play a ball that is stuck in soft or wet ground (whether in the fairway or the rough) should not be considered part of the normal challenge of playing a course.
- Allowing relief throughout the general area is consistent with other relief Rules, which do not make distinctions based on the height of the grass in the general area.
- Many Committees throughout the world, from the professional and elite amateur levels to the typical club level, have adopted the current Local Rule.
- In many countries the Local Rule is sufficiently well established that golfers assume that the Rules always allow relief anywhere in the general area.
- Reversing the default position will help avoid the confusion that sometimes exists today when clubs or players do not realize that such relief is not allowed unless a Local Rule has been adopted.
- Basing the relief area on the reference point “right behind” the spot of the embedded ball will avoid the question of what to do when a dropped ball comes to rest in the same pitch-mark where it had been embedded; such a ball will always be re-dropped because it came to rest outside the relief area.
- Allowing the ball to be dropped within a one club-length relief area ensures consistency with other free-relief Rules.