

# By Definition

*The Rules are full of intriguing situations, but you have to know the terms*

BY GENE WESTMORELAND

If you've ever taken time to examine the Rules of Golf book, you'll see that preceding the "Rules of Play" is a section on "Definitions." The fact that the Definitions have such a prominent place in the Rules book is no accident. In fact, I've heard them referred to as the building blocks on which the Rules are built, and I couldn't agree more.

I think most active golfers know that, with few exceptions, "loose impediments" are the *natural* objects found on a golf course. Loose impediments include stuff like stones, leaves, twigs and branches. On the other hand, items that are *artificial*, such as benches, ball washers and buildings, are not loose impediments and are instead labeled "obstructions."

Obstructions come in two varieties — movable and immovable — and the difference between the two is covered in the Definitions. Specifically, movable obstructions are defined as objects that may be moved without unreasonable effort, without unduly delaying play and without damaging the course. Another

difference is that you are *always* entitled to relief from movable obstructions, while there are a handful of situations where you would *not* get relief from immovable obstructions.

For instance, you should be *denied* relief from an immovable obstruction if it was clearly unreasonable to make a stroke because of interference by anything other than the immovable obstruction. Let's say you have to stand on a concrete cart path — an immovable obstruction — in order to address your ball. But your ball is buried between the roots of a large tree, a lie so bad it would make any effort to play your next stroke not merely difficult but impossible (*below, left*). You'd have only one choice — declare it unplayable.

Here are other examples where an understanding of the Definitions comes into play.

The same denial of relief would apply if you used an abnormal stance, swing or direction of play to *create* interference where none really exists. Let's say your ball ends up in a fairway divot hole a foot or so from a sprinkler head. You'd like to remove your ball from the divot, but the only way you can convince your opponent to agree to free relief is to demonstrate "interference" with the sprinkler head by addressing your ball left-handed or with a wide stance that is clearly exaggerated. If I were your opponent I'd tell you to go ahead and play it lefty if you want, but you are not entitled to relief.

When a player's ball comes to rest inside the margins of a water hazard, or lateral water hazard, the player is *not* entitled to relief from immovable obstructions. This may mean tough luck if you otherwise have a shot but have interference with a bridge or drain pipe.

There would be no relief from structures the Committee has declared "integral parts of the course." The windmills at Long Island's Southward Ho and The National Golf Links are local examples, and the stone road near the green of the Road Hole (No. 17) at the Old Course in St. Andrews, Scotland, may be the most famous.

Objects that would otherwise be considered immovable obstructions lose that status if they are located out of bounds. Unlikely perhaps, but this provision could apply if a neighbor's garage or swing set is located smack on your club's property line.

Finally, you are not entitled to relief from *fixed* objects such as out of bounds stakes, boundary walls and boundary fences because of an *exception* noted under the Definition of "Obstructions."

Ah, the Definitions... you can't learn the Rules without them! ■

