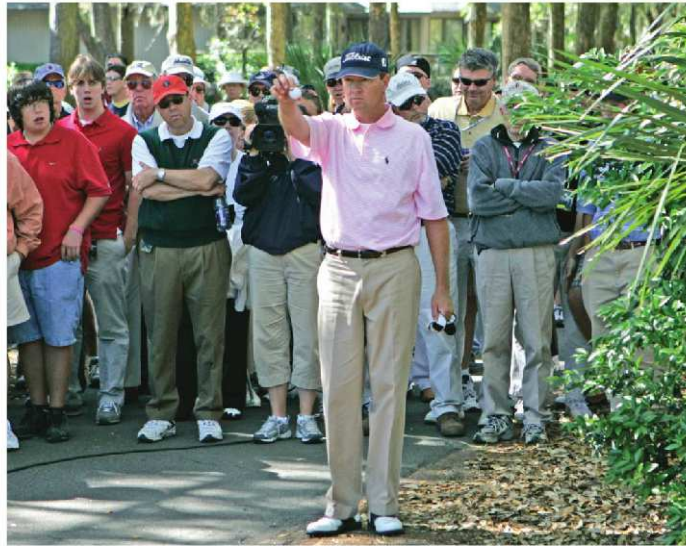


## RULES OF THE GAME

By Jodi Ciotti



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# Perils of the path

Usually, a player wants to take relief from an immovable obstruction such as a cart path, but there are cases where that might not be the best decision

**P**icture this: A player hits a tee shot on a par 4 a little off line, and when the player gets to his ball, he realizes he will have to stand on the cart path in order to hit his next shot. The player immediately begins to think about taking relief from the path, but soon it becomes obvious that a few large trees are in the area where the player would be taking the nearest point of full relief. His caddie says, “Just drop on the other side of the path; you’ll have a clear shot from there.” What should the player do?

Rule 24-2a explains that interference by an immovable obstruction (a cart path, for instance) occurs when the obstruction interferes with the lie of the ball, a player’s stance or the area of intended swing.

Rule 24-2b articulates the two-step procedure that must be followed should the player decide to take full relief from an immovable obstruction. First, determine the nearest point of relief. This is the point on the course nearest to where the ball lies that is not closer to the

hole and if the ball were on that point, there would be no interference from the obstruction (lie, stance, area of swing). The second step in the procedure is to drop the ball within one club-length of the nearest point of relief on a part of the course that avoids interference from the obstruction, and is not closer to the hole, in a hazard or on a putting green. This procedure requires the player to take complete relief from the immovable obstruction, but it does not guarantee an improved lie or free swing at the ball toward the hole.

The trees noted in the example above present a problem. While it is certainly generous of the caddie to suggest a player take relief in a spot that is more desirable for the next shot, it is obvious that dropping in that spot would not be the nearest point of relief as outlined in Rule 24-2b. More accurately, a player’s nearest point of relief (of which there is almost always only one) is, unfortunately, in the midst of the trees (see Decision 24-2b/3.5). In this situation, estimating the one club-

length he is entitled to while taking full relief from the culprit may not help him avoid those trees altogether and might put him directly behind a tree, thereby leaving no shot at all.

Human instinct tells you to immediately pick up any ball on or near a cart-path to begin the process of taking relief. But all too often, this happens before a player has an opportunity to truly assess the entire situation and, as we’ve just seen in this example, it is certainly possible that a player can take relief and still end up in a less desirable situation than where the ball was in the first place.

Next time you are on the course and your ball comes to rest on or near a cart path, before you rush to pick up your ball and take relief, assess your situation thoroughly before deciding whether to take relief. The best option might be to play the ball as it lies, which, as noted in Rule 13-1, a player is almost always entitled to do. ●

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