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When *not* to play like a pro

The rules are strict when it comes to those that jeopardize one's status as an amateur

There was a time when making a hole-in-one wasn't always a moment of unlimited glee.

That was, in the case of charity tournaments that might offer a vehicle for a hole-in-one, because the value of the prize exceeded what was permitted under the rules of amateur status; thus, an amateur had to face the difficult decision of turning down the car and remaining an amateur, or taking the vehicle and becoming a professional in the eyes of golf's governing bodies.

It was an odd set of circumstances that turned a double digit-handicapper into a professional because of one lucky shot. But the rules of amateur status have endured odd twists and turns, and now that no longer is the case.

Most amateur golfers are familiar with the credit in a golf shop or gift certificates received when they do well in a competition. The rules of amateur status put a limit on such prizes at a retail value of not more than \$750. This limit applies to the total value of merchandise or gift certificates received for any one event (e.g., club championship, a member-guest) or series of events (e.g., the club's weekly league competition).

An amateur golfer must not accept a cash prize of any amount for a golf competition or series of competitions. An additional caveat is that an amateur cannot exchange a merchandise prize or a voucher for cash. A player who does accept merchandise or a gift certificate prize valued at more than \$750 or a cash prize of any amount could lose his amateur status, typically for a period of one year, but the length depends on the extent of the violation.

Highly skilled amateurs often qualify for or are invited to compete in competitions involving professionals. This



could be a tour event, a state open or even a major championship. Though an amateur may participate in an event where prize money is offered, he must, before the event, waive his right to accept prize money. Organizers of golf competitions offering prize money in which amateurs compete must provide a form players can sign to waive any right to cash prizes. (Contact the United States Golf Association for a sample form.)

An amateur golfer may accept a prize valued at more than the \$750 limit, including cash, for a hole-in-one. This exception permits participation in a "hole-in-one club" and acceptance of "bar bill" costs on the day of a hole-in-one and any accompanying prizes. An accompanying prize might be a car offered by a local dealership and acceptance of such would not jeopardize the lucky recipient's amateur status. However, the exception for hole-in-

one prizes does not apply to hole-in-one competitions that are conducted other than while playing golf. For example, if a competition is designed to simply sell repeated attempts at a closest-to-the-hole or hole-in-one prize and participants simply make one or more shots at the same target, this exception does not apply.

Informal gambling or wagering among individual golfers or teams of golfers is permitted when it is incidental to the game and the primary purpose is playing the game for enjoyment and not for financial gain. Acceptable informal gambling is participation in a "player's pool" or "skins game" such that the players in general know each other; participation is optional and wagering is limited to

the players; the sole source of all the money won by the players is advanced by the participating players; and the amount of money involved is not generally considered to be excessive.

Forms of gambling or wagering that are unacceptable include those where there is a requirement for players to participate or that have the potential to involve considerable sums of money (e.g., calcuttas and auction sweepstakes, where players or teams are sold by auction). Other features of unacceptable gambling or wagering is when there is participation of non-players or when the amount of money involved is considered to be excessive.

As always, it's best to get clarification of matters that might be complicated because the penalties could be severe. When in doubt, call the USGA (800-222-8742) or the CDGA (630-257-2005). 🏌️