

By Jodi Ciotti

We're talkin' about practice?

When can a player practice on the course? That depends.

A common rules question that arises regarding competitions involves the ability of players to practice on the golf course during the day of a competition.

Rule 7 discusses practicing before, or between rounds, as well as during a tournament.

While establishing the ground rules for practicing during a competition, three important distinctions must be known: Is the tournament round being played as a match-play or stroke-play competition?

Does the practice occur before or between rounds or during a stipulated round?

There are similarities in the practice rule for both match play and stroke play that occur during the round. However, there is one major difference between match play and stroke play regarding practice that occurs before or between rounds of a tournament.

Let's start with the similarities.

In both match play and stroke play, Rule 7-2 states that between the play of two holes, a player may practice putting or chipping on or near the putting green of the hole last played, any practice putting green or the teeing ground of the next hole to be played in the round. It is important to note, however, in both forms of play, a player must not take a practice stroke from a hazard and must not unduly delay play (Rule 6-7). Another caveat of the rule that has tripped up competitors is the phrase *next teeing ground to be played* stipulation. This



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must be the teeing ground where the tee markers are located that day; practicing on an unused teeing ground would violate the rule. The penalty for breach of this practice rule is a loss of hole in match play and two strokes in stroke play.

The major difference in the practice rules involve both fairness and the time during which the practice occurs. Match play is generally between two competitors, each with equal opportunity to practice on the tournament course prior to play on the day of the competition. Rule 7-1a states that on any day of a match-play competition, a player may practice on the competition course before a round.

In stroke play, players may not necessarily be afforded the

opportunity to practice on the competition course because of early or late starting times and, of course, the ongoing tournament play. Rule 7-1b therefore states that before any day of a stroke-play competition, a player must *not* practice on the competition course. If two or more rounds of a stroke-play competition are to be played over consecutive days, a player must *not* practice between those rounds on any competition course that remains to be played. The penalty for breach of this rule is disqualification.

As discussed in the June Rules article, the Committee is responsible for creating the conditions of competition and may decide to adjust practice rules accordingly. The Committee, in the conditions of competition (Rule 33-1), may prohibit practice on or near the putting green of the hole last played during the round; prohibit practice in match play before or between rounds on the day of competition; or allow practice either before or between tournament rounds in stroke play (Rule 33-2c).

Everyone likes to feel well-prepared to play their next tournament round. But before a player heads out to that all-important championship, be sure to verify any and all rules regarding practice with the tournament committee prior to teeing it up. 🏌️

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