

**Rule 1** in the Rules of Golf states the following with the emphasis being the first bullet point.

**Purpose:** Rule 1 introduces these central principles of the game for the player:

- **Play the course as you find it and play the ball as it lies.**
- Play by the Rules and in the spirit of the game.
- You are responsible for applying your own penalties if you breach a Rule, so that you cannot gain any potential advantage over your opponent in match play or other players in stroke play.

Although playing the balls as it lies is the premise of the game of golf, The Rules of Golf does allow for Preferred Lies, in order to reward, rather than penalise, players for hitting fairways. The Preferred Lies local rule, however, is over-used in South Africa, as we see clubs applying this Local Rule whenever the fairways aren't pristine, for entire seasons and, in the odd case, they have Preferred Lies as a permanent Local Rule (i.e. in effect every day of the year). This issue needs to be addressed as we move towards to the World Handicap System, which will come in to effect on 1 January 2020.

At this time, we feel it is important to push the reasoning and understanding for having Preferred Lies, so that golf clubs and club golfers start to realise that Preferred Lies should not be the norm and should only be in effect under exceptional circumstances – or to use the Rules of Golf's terminology, under "occasional local abnormal conditions". It is important to note that this Local Rule also states that Preferred Lies should be withdrawn as soon as conditions allow, as can be seen in the Local Rule excerpt below.

The question you may be asking is, "What are these 'occasional local abnormal conditions'?"

**Occasional Local Abnormal Conditions would be the following:**

- Disease on the fairways, whereby the grass has died and "pit marks" form on the fairway, making it hard for a player to make a clean strike on the ball.
- Extremely wet conditions. This may last a day, a few days, or couple of weeks until the fairways dry out enough so that balls pitching in the fairways don't get "**mud balls**" (mud clogs sticking to the ball that cause the ball to fly skew when hit).
- Extremely dry or drought conditions. Just because fairways are dry, it does not mean that the course needs Preferred Lies. If you watched The Open at Carnoustie in 2018, the fairways were brown and dusty because of the heat wave that the UK was experiencing, but there was no Preferred Lies as there was grass covering. Preferred Lies would only be acceptable under dry conditions when the fairways weren't knitted together or where the ball would need to be played from sandy patches in the fairway.
- A fairway or the course is undergoing course maintenance of sorts and the course would recover after a short period. Examples of this would be a fairway being re-sodded or fairways being scarified. It would be appropriate in the case of one fairway being re-sodded or relayed to allow Preferred Lies on the one hole and not the entire golf course.

Preferred Lies shouldn't be in effect just because the player is not going to get a perfect lie every time he hits the fairway as that, once again, is not the premise of the game. **Play the course as you find it and play the ball as it lies.**

**The Local Rule excerpt from the Rules of Golf is as follows:**

### **Local Rule 8E-3 Preferred Lies**

*Purpose. When **occasional local abnormal conditions** might interfere with fair play, the affected parts of the course can be defined as Ground Under Repair. But adverse conditions such as heavy snows, spring thaws, prolonged rains or extreme heat can sometimes damage the course or prevent use of heavy mowing equipment.*

*When such conditions are widespread on the course, the Committee can choose to adopt a Local Rule for "preferred lies" (also known as "winter rules") to allow fair play or help protect the fairway. Such a Local Rule should be withdrawn as **soon as conditions allow**.*

*The use of this Local Rule outside the fairway in the general area is not recommended as it may result in a player receiving free relief from areas where a ball might otherwise be unplayable (such as in areas of bushes or trees).*

*It is not authorised to implement this Local Rule once play has begun for a strokeplay round. Doing so would allow players who have more holes to play the advantage of using it for a longer period of time. The Local Rule could be implemented once a match has begun between the play of two holes as opponents have an equal benefit.*

*For guidance on when and how this Local Rule may be used in order for scores to be submitted for handicapping purposes (including the size of the relief area and if it may only be used in the fairway), consult the rules or recommendations contained within the Handicap System operating in the local jurisdiction.*

### **Model Local Rule E-3**

*"When a player's ball lies in a part of the general area cut to fairway height or less [or identify a specific area such as 'on the fairway of the 6th hole'], the player may take free relief once by placing the original ball or another ball in and playing it from this relief area:*

- *Reference Point: Spot of the original ball.*
- *Size of Relief Area Measured from Reference Point: [Specify size of relief area, such as one club-length, one scorecard length or 6 inches] from the reference point, **but** with these limits:*
- *Limits on Location of Relief Area:*
  - *Must not be nearer the hole than the reference point, and*
  - *Must be in the general area.*
  - ***Note:** When specifying the size of the relief area it is recommended that you go with the smallest area that allows for "fair play". For example, if the fairways are in good condition but wet enough so that players are getting 'mud balls', then lift, clean and replace would be recommended. On the other hand, if the fairways are in drought and there is very little grass on them, then a 1 club-length relief area would be necessary. This would be up to the club committee to decide but erring on the side a minimum size relief area.*