

Bunkers – firm sides and raked bottoms

By Missy Jones • @missyjonjones • April 3, 2015



I've gotten lots of questions about my Tweet on bunker maintenance. Watching Jimmy Walker dig and dig for his ball on the par-4 12th at the Valero Texas Open last week only strengthened my opinion on it. The time spent on identifying his ball, recreating the lie and then somehow getting it out were painful to watch and it's unnecessary.

This picture of a bunker here at the LPGA ANA Inspiration in Rancho Mirage shows exactly how I think they should be managed – firm sides with raked bottoms. Many people saw this method while watching the President's Cup at Royal Melbourne in Australia where they use a broom or the back of a rake to tamp down the sand on the edges. Some courses even use a squeegee to do the same thing. A firm face makes the fried egg lie and searching for balls less likely.

Many comments suggested that this method cut down on the difficulty of the bunker shot and I disagree. You still have to hit off sand, you still have to clear the lip and you still have to negotiate this hazard. Having firm sides makes the ball roll down to where you can get a club on it which is how bunkers are meant to be. Bunkers are usually in the fairway or by greens – in the play zone. Why have a buried lie that might be unplayable and force a penalty stroke for a shot that was pretty good and down the

middle? I would rather save Rule 28 – Ball Unplayable for situations where you have hit a bad shot offline and find yourself in a bush, behind a tree or in a bad lie.

Regular courses will find that if they rake only the bottoms and leave the faces alone, they can save money by lessening hours spent on maintenance as well as buying less sand that no longer gets thrown out from shots or spills over the edges. The sides should only be raked if they get washed out or when somebody or something walks up them and messes it up.

Whether a course adopts this technique for playability or to save money, the grounds crew, the players and their budgets will be happier.