

# Connecting the dots – the rules challenges Of Chambers Bay

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Everyone is talking about the dots on the greens this week at Chambers Bay, but it's really not that unusual or unprecedented. The USGA has used it in other championships like the Amateur Public Links and the Women's Amateur Public Links at Bandon Dunes in 2011 as well as when the U.S. Amateur was at Chambers Bay a year earlier.

Aside from players needing to know when they can mark and lift their ball, this definition also has bearing when we talk about touching the line of putt, relief from an obstruction, or whether a player should drop or place a ball. A player better not brush aside sand or loose soil unless it is within the margin defined as the putting green, for example, because those are loose impediments on the green only.

Players have different rights and obligations the closer they get to the hole so what part of the course a ball is located is important for many rules.

The U.S. Open has the luxury and privilege of having a walking rules official with each group who can help the players work through this process. Not unlike officials having to decide the margins of bunkers this week and at Pinehurst last year, they will use their best judgment to decide how the dots get connected and where the margin of the green is deemed to exist. The official is also an insurance policy because if they deem a margin is in a particular place then the player is off the hook as far as a penalty that might be associated with what part of the course the player's ball sits.

Another interesting aspect of holding our national championship at Chambers Bay is that the USGA is employing the local rule for immovable obstructions close to the putting green. Rule 24-2 provides relief, without penalty, from interference by an immovable obstruction, but it also provides that, except on the putting green, intervention on the line of play is not, of itself, interference under this rule. Because players may wish to putt from just off the green, the Rules of Golf give us the option to allow for a local rule in this situation. Immovable obstructions (namely sprinkler heads here) on the apron may interfere with the proper playing of the game and the introduction of the following local rule providing additional relief, without

penalty, from intervention by an immovable obstruction is warranted at Chambers Bay. It reads:

“Relief from interference by an immovable obstruction may be taken under Rule 24-2.

In addition, if a ball lies through the green and an immovable obstruction on or within two club-lengths of the putting green and within two club-lengths of the ball intervenes on the line of play between the ball and the hole, the player may take relief as follows:

The ball must be lifted and dropped at the nearest point to where the ball lay that (a) is not nearer the hole, (b) avoids intervention and (c) is not in a hazard or on a putting green.

If the player’s ball lies on the putting green and an immovable obstruction within two club-lengths of the putting green intervenes on his line of putt, the player may take relief as follows:

The ball must be lifted and placed at the nearest point to where the ball lay that (a) is not nearer the hole, (b) avoids intervention and (c) is not in a hazard.

The ball may be cleaned when lifted.”

This championship is going to be unique and fascinating to watch. Feel free to ask me rules questions throughout the week and have fun watching it all play out.