

Lift, Clean and Place – Why?

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Many tweeps are talking about the “ball in hand” or “lift, clean and place” local rule that isn’t in effect at the PGA Championship this week so let’s talk about it. Even if I prefer it not be used (we face adversity on the course and that is part of why we love this game), I’m realistic enough to know why it sometimes does.

We define the game by the rules of golf, which tell us that we need to play the ball as it lies and play the course as we find it. Rarely do we lift the ball if we can help it and this local rule will usually only come into play if there is significant casual water and/or significant ground under repair areas. It becomes a pace of play issue if officials are running around helping players get their ball back in play time after time because of adverse conditions. It shortens the process if we don’t make them drop under 25-1, then it embeds, then we have to get relief from that and since they have their ball in their hand we let them clean it etc etc. Letting players lift, clean and place within one club length no closer to the hole will generally get them in a place that avoids the casual water and damaged areas in a fairly quick manner.

Some other tweeps felt that since the Championship is a major, it would be horrid to let them have “lift, clean and place.” I personally think that a “minor” event like the USGA Girl’s Junior Amateur is just as important as a major championship (it certainly is to the people playing them) and the degree of “importance” should have no bearing. The “ball in hand” local rule should be a very last resort and it seems as if Valhalla Golf Club drains rather quickly and it’s not needed. Officials adjusted some hole locations because of pooling water and this local rule is just another tool we have to combat bad weather.

I’ve never seen a USGA Championship ever have “lift, clean and place” in effect and I hope I never do but we have the luxury of having an official with each group or, at the very least, an official or two on each hole to help players get their ball back in play. On the professional Tours, there are officials in carts going from ruling to ruling and local events may not have any officials at all, so this local rule helps keep play going at a reasonable pace.

So, while some have the misguided perception that this local rule is meant to save players from mud balls or poor lies, that is not what it is about. It coincidentally does mean that sometimes but the rules of golf are not meant to cater to pampered players used to having the universe fair on all counts. Hit the ball, find it and hit again. We try to keep it as simple as that if we can.