

Rules not always black and white – did Nomura build a stance?

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April 24, 2016



Often times the rules of golf become somewhat subjective and up to interpretation especially in cases where we need to decide “questions of fact.” Yesterday during Round three of the 2016 Swinging Skirts LPGA Classic, the officials had to make one of these decisions. Haru Nomura had a difficult lie in the bunker on the 6th hole. Officials got a call that she may have built a stance while addressing her ball which would have been a two stroke penalty under 13-3.

Looking at the video over and over (<http://www.golfchannel.com/media/nomura-leads-swinging-skirts-despite-possible-rules-infraction/>) we see her trying to figure out how to get in there and get the club on the ball. The rules of golf allow a player to “fairly take their stance” and Decision 13-2/1 gives us guidance on how to decide what is “fairly.” The Decision says that the player needs “to select the least intrusive course of action which results in the *minimum* improvement in the position or the lie of the ball, area of intended stance or swing.” It can be argued that is exactly what she was doing. It goes on to say that the player “must accommodate the situation in which the ball is found and take a stance as normal as the circumstances permit.” I’m not sure she could get into that bunker and address the ball without some sand getting shifted downwards.

Nomura was entitled to place her feet firmly, even dig in a bit, but she must not build a stance. In other words, officials were looking closely to see if she is dragging sand down to make her foot more level. A player can’t keep going in and out of her stance which effectively builds a stance just by default. It seems at times she was walking a very fine line and almost doing that but in the end it was deemed she was just trying to get her footing. It’s a gray area and I really feel this ruling could have gone either way. The rules aren’t always black and white.