

A Unique Oakmont #9

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The 68 yard deep ninth green shares its real estate with the practice putting green so it presents some interesting rules situations. The Notice to Players states that, "Practice is permitted before and between rounds on or near the back part of the putting green (i.e. the clubhouse side of the blue stakes and blue dots). When a player is making the turn from hole #18 to hole #1, the back part of the putting green is considered to be a practice putting green. If a player makes a practice stroke or rolls a ball for the purpose of testing the putting surface on the other side of the blue stakes and the blue dot, Rule 7-1b applies (penalty – disqualification).

What this is telling us is that one part of the green is the competition course and one part is a practice area. We know under Rule 7-1 that practicing on the competition course is not allowed and results in a disqualification. Players have asked if they would have a problem if they accidentally hit a putt too hard while practicing and it rolled beyond the blue stake during a competition round. The answer is "no" if it was unintentional but if an official saw that player lining up, addressing the ball and having INTENT to purposefully roll a ball to test the break or conditions on the other side, we would be asking some questions.

This Notice also tells us that “When a player is making the turn from hole #18 to hole #1, the back part of the putting green is considered to be a practice putting green.” What does this mean and why do we spell this out? Under Rule 7-2, which deals with practice during a round, we know that as long as he does not unduly delay play (Rule 6-7) a player can practice putting or chipping on or near any practice putting green on the course. This statement tells him that it is an acceptable place to do this if is waiting for the #1 tee to clear for example.

What happens if a player ball comes to rest above the blue stake during the play of hole #9? The Committee has deemed the entire green to be in play in this situation so he would just play as normal and treat the entire green as being in play. It is not a “Wrong Putting Green” which is contemplated under Rule 25-3 where the player would have to drop one club length from his nearest point of relief off the green. How about if his ball comes to rest in one of the practice holes above the stakes? The definition of Ground Under Repair includes a “hole made by a greenkeeper” so the player would take relief under Rule 25-1 and place his ball on the green on his nearest point of relief.

This is a unique situation for the playing of the ninth hole at the 2016 U.S. Open Championship at Oakmont Country Club but the Rules of Golf can handle it.