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Rule 23 (Loose Impedimentsⁱ)

(R & A Decisions on the Rules of Golf 2014 – 2015)

NOTE: There has been a bit of discussion on what is a ‘Loose Impediment’, clearing loose impediments from in ‘front’ of the ball – off the green – and how to apply the rules.

23-1 RELIEF

Except when both the *loose impediment* and the ball lie in or touch the same *hazard*, any *loose impediment* may be removed without penalty.

If the ball lies anywhere other than on the *putting green* and the removal of a *loose impediment* by the player causes the ball to move, Rule 18-2a applies.

On the *putting green*, if the ball or ball-marker is accidentally moved in the process of the player removing a *loose impediment*, the ball or ball-marker must be replaced. There is no penalty provided the movement of the ball or ball-marker is directly attributable to the removal of the loose impediment.

Otherwise, if the player causes the ball to move, he incurs a penalty of one stroke under Rule 18-2a

When a ball is in motion, a *loose impediment* that might influence the movement of the ball must not be removed.

Note: If the ball lies in a *hazard*, the player must not touch or move any loose impediment lying in or touching the same *hazard* – see Rule 13-4c.

See Local (Club) Rule (Club Website):

ENSURE you read ‘what is defined by the R&A 2014-2015 Rules book as a Loose Impediment’ found as an endnote to this document.

LOOSE IMPEDIMENTS: GENERAL

23/2 – Meaning of “Solidly Embedded” in definition of “Loose Impediments”.

Q: The definition of “Loose Impediments” states that a stone is a loose impediment if it is not “solidly embedded”. When is a stone solidly embedded?

A: If a stone is partially embedded and may be picked up with ease, it is a loose impediment. When there is doubt as to whether a stone is solidly embedded or not, it should not be removed.

23/4 – Fruit Skins.

Q: Is a banana skin or other fruit skin a loose impediment?

A: **YES.**

23/5 – Ant Hill.

Q: Is an ant hill a loose impediment?

A: **YES.** An ant hill is a cast or heap made by an insect. A player is entitled to remove an ant hill under Rule 23-1. (Revised)

Related Decisions:

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- [23/11 Loose Soil from Cast of Hole Made by Burrowing Animal.](#)
- [25/23 Molehills.](#)
- [33-8/22 Local Rule Treating Ant Hills as Ground Under repair.](#)

23/5.5 – Status of Insect-Like Creatures.

Q: The definition of “Loose Impediments” provides that worms, insects and the like are loose impediments. The term “the like” includes creatures such as spiders. A web made by a spider is considered to be a cast made by an insect and is also a loose impediment, even if attached to another object.

23/6.5 – Status of Snake.

Q: What is the status of a snake?

A: A live snake is an outside agency. A dead snake is both an outside agency and a loose impediment. It is possible for an item or person to fall under more than one Definition.

23/7 – Fallen Tree.

Q: Is a fallen tree a loose impediment?

A: If it is still attached to the stump, **NO**; if it is not attached to the stump, **YES**.

23/8 – Worm Partially Underground.

Q: Is a worm, when half on top of the surface of the ground and half below, a loose impediment which may be removed? Or is it fixed or solidly embedded and therefore not a loose impediment?

A: A worm which is half underground and is not “fixed or growing” or “solidly embedded” within the meaning of those terms in the Definition of “Loose Impediments”. Accordingly, such a worm may be removed under Rule 16-1a(i) or Rule 23.

23/9 – Embedded Acorn. (Australia you could add Gum Nut)

Q: Is an embedded acorn a loose impediment?

A: Not if the acorn is solidly embedded – see Definition of “Loose Impediments”.

See Local (Club) Rule (Club Website) ONLY for 14th and 17th green side areas:

23/10 – Ball Embedded in Fruit.

Q: A ball is embedded in an orange lying under an orange tree. What is the ruling?

A: The player must play the ball as it lies or deem it unplayable. Since the orange was adhering to the ball, it was not a loose impediment.

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23/11 – Loose Soil from Cast of Hole Made by Burrowing Animal.

Q: A player's ball lies through the green¹ in the cast of a hole made by a burrowing animal. In addition to his relief options under Rule 25, may the player remove the loose soil, which forms the cast, from around his ball?

A: **NO.** The cast made by a burrowing animal is not a loose impediment – see Definition of "Loose Impediments". (Revised)

23/12 – Aeration Plugs.

Q: Are plugs of compact soil produced through aeration of fairways loose impediments?

A: **YES.** Loose soil is not a loose impediment. However, such plugs, since they consist of compacted soil, are loose impediments.

23/13 – Lump of Earth.

Q: Is a loose lump of soil a loose impediment?

A: **YES.** Loose soil is not a loose impediment except on the putting green. However, a lump of earth is not loose soil. (Revised).

23/14 – Loose Impediments Used to Surface Road.

Q: A player hits his ball onto a gravel-covered road. Even though he is entitled to relief from this obstruction, he prefers to play the ball from the road. May he remove gravel that might interfere with his stroke?

A: **YES.** Gravel is a loose impediment and a player may remove loose impediments under Rule 23-1. This right is not cancelled by the fact that, when a road is covered with gravel, it becomes an artificially-surfaced road and thus an immovable obstruction. The same principle applies to roads or paths constructed with stone, crushed shell, wood chips or the like.

RELIEF FROM LOOSE IMPEDIMENTS:

23-1/1 – Means by Which Loose Impediments may be Removed.

Q: Worm casts are loose impediments. By what means may such casts be removed?

A: Loose impediments may be removed by any means, except that, in removing loose impediments on the line of putt, the player must not press anything down (Rule 16-1a).

23-1/2 – Large Stone removable Only with Much Effort.

¹ Through the Green is the whole area of the *course* except:

- a. The teeing ground and putting green of the hole being played; and
- b. All *hazards* on the course.

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Q: A player's ball lies in the rough directly behind a loose stone the size of a watermelon. The stone can be removed only with much effort. Is it a loose impediment which may be removed?

A: **YES.** Stones of any size (not solidly embedded) are loose impediments and may be removed, provided removal does not unduly delay play. (Rule 6-7).

23-1/3 – Assistance in Removing Large Loose Impediment.

Q: May spectators, caddies, fellow-competitors etc assist a player in removing a large loose impediment?

A: **YES.**

23-1/4 – Breaking Off Part of Large Loose Impediment.

Q: If part of a large branch which has fallen from a tree (and thus is a loose impediment) interferes with a player's swing, may the player break off the interfering part rather than move the whole branch?

A: **YES.**

23-1/5 – Removal of Insect on Ball.

Q: A live insect is stationary or crawling on a player's ball. What may the player do to remove the insect?

A: A live insect is not considered to be adhering to the ball, and therefore is a loose impediment – see Definition of "Loose Impediments".

If the player's ball lies through the green, the player may remove the insect with his fingers or blow the insect off the ball, but if doing so causes the ball to move, there is a penalty under Rule 18-2a. If the player's ball lies on the putting green, the player may take the same actions, but there is no penalty if he causes the ball to move provided the movement is directly attributable to the removal of the loose impediment (see Rule 23-1)

If the player's ball lies in a hazard, the insect is considered to be in the hazard and he may not touch or physically remove the insect from the ball (Rule 13-4c). However, as the insect is animate and capable of moving on its own, the player may take action, such as waving his hand, a club or towel, to encourage the insect to move. If the insect moves, there is no penalty, provided the player has not touched the insect while it on the ball, touched the ground in the hazard or water in the water hazard with his hand or club, or moved the ball. (Revised)

23-1/6 – Removal of Loose Impediments from Area in Which Ball to Be Dropped.

Q: Through the green, is it permissible for a player to remove loose impediments from the area in which he is preparing to drop his ball?

A: **YES.**

23-1/6.5 – Removal of Loose Impediments from Spot Where Ball to Be Placed.

Q: Through the green, a player taking relief under a Rule drops his ball and it rolls more than two club lengths. He re-drops under Rule 20-2c, with the same result. He must now place the ball as near as possible to the spot where it first struck a part of the

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course when re-dropped – Rule 20-2c. Before he places the ball, may he remove loose impediments on or around the spot on which the ball is to be placed?

A: **YES.** (Revised).

23-1/7 – Loose Impediment Affecting Lie Moved When Ball Lifted.

Q: A loose impediment affecting a player's lie is moved when the player lifts his ball under a Rule that requires him to replace the ball. In equity (Rule 1-4) should the player be required to replace the loose impediment?

A: **YES.** If he fails to do so when his ball lies through the green, in equity (Rule 1-4), the player incurs a penalty of one stroke in both Matchplay and stroke play. If he fails to do so when the ball lies in a hazard and the loose impediment was originally lying in or touching the same hazard, in equity (Rule 1-4), the player loses the hole in match play or incurs a penalty of two strokes in stroke play.

23-1/1 – Loose Impediments Affecting Lie Removed While Ball Lifted.

Q: A player's ball lies in an area through the green where there are a number of loose impediments, including a tree branch against which the ball has come to rest. It appears likely that the ball will move if the player moves the tree branch. The player wishes to lift the ball under Rule 5-3 (Ball Unfit for Play) or Rule 12-2 (Identifying Ball), or he is requested to lift it under Rule 22 (Ball Assisting or Interfering with Play). He lifts the ball but, before replacing it, he removes the loose impediments in the area, including the tree branch against which the ball was resting. Is this permissible?

A: **NO.** Under Rule 18-2a, through the green a player incurs a penalty if he causes his ball to move as a result of moving a loose impediment. It would circumvent this Rule if, before a ball is replaced, it is permissible to remove loose impediments which affected the player's lie before the ball was lifted. In equity (Rule 1-4), the player should be penalised one stroke.

In such circumstances, if a player wishes to remove loose impediments affecting his lie, he should do so either before lifting the ball or after replacing it. If his ball then moves as a result of moving the loose impediments, the player incurs a penalty stroke under Rule 18-2a and must replace the ball.

23-1/9 – Removal of Loose Impediment Lying Out of Bounds.

Q: A loose impediment lying out of bounds, interferes with a player's stance. May the player remove the impediment?

A: **YES.**

23-1/10 – Removal of Loose Impediments Affecting Player's Play.

Q: A player with a downhill putt picks up loose impediments between his ball and the hole but leaves some behind the hole. An opponent or fellow-competitor removes loose impediments behind the hole that might have served as backstop for the player's ball. What is the ruling?

A: In equity (Rule 1-4), the player is entitled, but not required, to replace the loose impediments.

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The opponent or fellow-competitor is permitted to remove the loose impediments by Rule 23-1, and accordingly he is not in breach of Rule 1-2 (see Exception to Rule 1-2). However, if the opponent or fellow-competitor has refused to comply with a request from the player not to remove the loose impediments, the opponent loses the hole (see Decision 2/3) or the fellow-competitor is disqualified (Rule 3-4) for intentionally denying the player's right to have the loose impediments left in position. The same principles apply to the removal of a movable obstruction in similar circumstances.

23-1/11 – Ball Moved Accidentally by Foot During Removal of Loose Impediments on Putting Green.

Q: A player in the process of removing a loose impediment on the putting green accidentally moved his ball with his foot. What is the ruling?

A: The player incurs a penalty stroke under Rule 18-2a, and the ball must be replaced. Rule 23-1 provides that the player incurs no penalty if, on the putting green, his ball is accidentally moved in the process of removing a loose impediment. However, this Rule applies only where the moving of a ball is directly attributable to removal of a loose impediment. In this case, removal of the loose impediment did not cause the ball to move.

23-1/12 – After Ball Addressed on Putting Green Ball Moved in removal of Loose Impediment.

Q: After a player addresses his ball on the putting green, an insect alights on the ball. The player bends over without moving his feet and, in attempting to brush the insect off the ball, moves the ball several inches. Is the player subject to a penalty stroke under Rule 18-2b?

A: **NO.** An insect is a loose impediment – see Definition of “Loose Impediments” and Decision 23-1/5.

Under Rule 23-1, a player incurs no penalty if a ball on the putting green moves while he is in the process of removing a loose impediment. Rule 23-1 overrides Rule 18-2b in this case.

ⁱ Loose Impediments – what is defined by the R&A 2014-2015 Rules book as a Loose Impediment?

Loose Impediments:

“Loose Impediments” are natural objects, including:

- Stones, leaves, braches and the like;
- Dung (ie duck poo);
- Worms, insects and the like, and the casts and heaps made by them; provided they are not:
 - Fixed or growing;
 - Solidly embedded; or
 - Adhering to the ball.
- **Sand and loose soil are *loose impediments* on the *putting green*, but not elsewhere;**
- Snow and natural ice, other than frost, are wither *casual water* or *loose impediments*, at the option of the player;
- **Dew and frost are not *loose impediments*.**

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