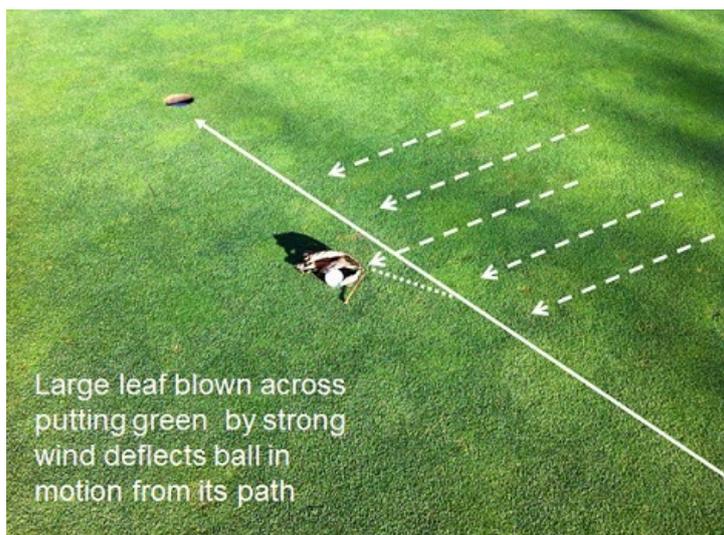


Leaf in Motion Blows Putted Ball off Course



A comment made recently, during a televised US golf tournament, has stimulated a discussion on the Rules that I think readers may find interesting. The commentator suggested that if a leaf that is blown by the wind across a putting green, deflects a ball in motion that was putted from the putting green, the stroke must be

cancelled and taken again. Many viewers thought that this cannot be correct; that the deflection of the ball was a 'rub of the green' and the ball must be played from where it came to rest.

For once (!) the TV commentator was right. The relevant Rule is 19-1b; ***If a player's ball in motion after a stroke on the putting green is deflected or stopped by, or comes to rest in or on, any moving or animate outside agency, except a worm, insect or the like, the stroke is cancelled. The ball must be replaced and replayed.***

On being pointed to this Rule, readers may think that it does not apply, because a leaf is a loose impediment and not an outside agency. However, there are many situations where an item or person may have more than one status under the Rules. A leaf blown by the wind it is obviously still a loose impediment but it can also be a moving outside agency. Decision 18-1/6 is relevant, but note that in this case it deals with a ball at rest that is moved; ***Q. A tumbleweed blowing across the course strikes a ball at rest and knocks it into the hole. What is the procedure?***

A. In the circumstances, a tumbleweed is an outside agency. Rule 18-1 applies and the ball must be replaced without penalty.

I hope that the above is clear. The stroke may only be cancelled in the unlikely event that a ball in motion from a stroke on the putting green is deflected, i.e. moved from the direction that it was rolling, by a leaf that is also in motion. It does not give licence to players who miss putts in autumnal conditions to claim that their ball was diverted by a leaf, or anything else at rest on the putting green.