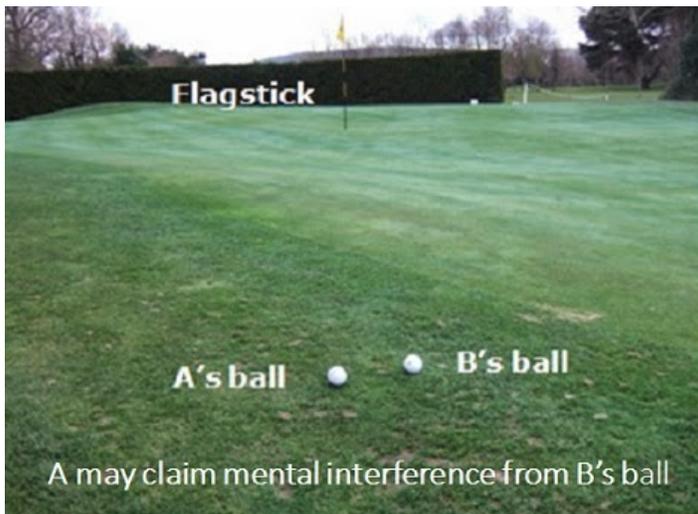


Mental Interference in Golf



Most players are aware that they can only take relief from an immovable obstruction (Rule 24-2) or abnormal ground condition (Rule 25-1) when their ball lies in or touches the obstruction or condition, or when it physically interferes with their stance or their area of intended swing. There is no relief for mental interference under either of these Rules.

This is confirmed by Decision 24-2a/1;

Q. A player's ball lies several inches to the side of a sprinkler head. The sprinkler head does not physically interfere with the player's stance or the area of his intended swing. However, the sprinkler head bothers the player mentally. Is the player entitled to relief under Rule 24-2b?

A. No. See Rule 24-2a.

However, there is one Rule where mental interference is relevant. The start of Rule 22-2 states;

Except when a ball is in motion, if a player considers that another ball might interfere with his play, he may have it lifted.

Note that there is no mention as to how far away the other ball must be. In fact, Decision 22/1 states;

Q. In order for A to be entitled to have B's ball lifted because of interference, does B's ball have to be on or near A's line of play and thus in a position to interfere physically with A's ball? Or may A also have B's ball lifted if it is off his line of play but catches his eye and thus constitutes mental interference?

A. A player may, under Rule 22-2, have another ball lifted if the ball interferes either physically or mentally with his play.

Not quite the same as mental interference, but along the same lines, are mental distractions that occur while a player is making a stroke. Decision 1-4/2, in the section on points not covered by the Rules, states;

Q. As A was making his backswing, B accidentally dropped a ball, which rolled within six inches of A's ball. The appearance of the dropped ball startled A, causing him to top his shot. In equity, should A be permitted to replay his stroke?

A. No. Distractions are a common occurrence which players must accept.

A related point to clarify on this subject is that, in equity, a player does not have to play their ball that has come to rest in a situation that is dangerous to them, e.g. near a live rattlesnake or a bees' nest, Decision 1-4/10, but they may not take relief from a situation which they dislike; unpleasant lies are a common occurrence which players must accept, Decision 1-4/11.

I have one last point, which is not backed-up by any Decision on the Rules. In my opinion, a player should not be penalised under Rule 6-8 for discontinuing play due to fog. Having played in foggy conditions on more than one occasion, there is definitely mental interference for the players, as well as the obvious possible danger for anyone on the course while play continues. Whilst Rule 6-8a states that bad weather is not of itself a good reason for discontinuing play, there is an exception which could be used when there is limited visibility due to fog; *“the player must not discontinue play unless: ... there is some other good reason such as sudden illness”*, which I think any Committee would be wise to apply.