

## Flagsticks and Hole Depths during the COVID-19 Pandemic – Some FAQs for Qualifying Competitions

Many clubs are using flagsticks with lifter mechanisms attached to them that modify the flagstick in this way. In line with the current public health advice and the GUI/ILGU Protocol, it is strongly advised that players do not touch the flagstick. Other clubs have used foam insertions or other materials which modify the depth of the hole to facilitate safe retrieval of the ball without a lifter. Others, again, have inserted the hole cups upside-down for the same purpose. The purpose of this document is to address some frequently asked questions regarding these issues and their application in qualifying competitions.

**Q – The Flagstick is lying at an angle in the hole and will almost certainly prevent my ball from dropping below the level of the surface if it rolls into the hole. I know I'm not supposed to touch the flag, but can I move it back to the centre of the hole with my putter?**

**A – Yes.** Under Rule 13.2a, a player may either leave the flagstick where it is in the hole or move it so that it is centred in the hole and leave it there. Of course, in the circumstances, you must be careful not to damage the flagstick when using a putter/other club, instead of your hand, to reposition the flagstick so that it is centred.

**Q – The flagstick is lying at an angle in the hole and despite trying to centre it several times with my putter, it won't stay in place for very long because of the wind. Normally I would just take the flag out, but my club have ruled that the flagstick must not be touched or removed from the hole. Can I have my fellow competitor continue to centre the flag while I putt?**

**A – Yes.** The centring of the flagstick may be allowed while another player putts. In this circumstance, the fellow competitor is not attending the flagstick, just centring it. The person holding the flagstick with the putter must keep it in the centred position until ball comes to rest or until it is clear it is not going to hit the flagstick in any way. There is no penalty if the person accidentally lets go of the flagstick in this situation. However, if the player tries to gain an advantage by directing the person to let go of the flagstick in another position, the player gets the General Penalty under Rule 13.2a. If an opponent/fellow competitor intentionally moves the flagstick to a position to affect where the player's ball might go or come to rest, they get the General Penalty under Rule 8.3b.

**Q – I have asked my fellow competitor to centre the flagstick with his putter while I putt. However, my ball then hits my fellow competitor. Is there a penalty and what do I do?**

**A – If this is accidental, there is no penalty and the ball must be played as it lies.** See Rule 13.2b, which also explains what happens if the ball is deliberately deflected or stopped in these circumstances. The answers above and this explanation would also apply to a scenario where the person centring the flagstick lets go of the flagstick and this action then causes the ball to be deflected.

**Q – Our Greenkeeping Staff have inserted foam into the hole to ensure the ball doesn't drop all the way to the bottom, so that we can safely pick our balls out of the cup. However, I have arrived at a green and the foam has come loose and is now sticking out of the hole making it impossible to hole the putt. Can I push it back down into the hole with my putter?**

**A – Yes.** Where any safety equipment associated with the hole has been moved outside of its intended position by natural forces, the player may take reasonable actions to reinstate it to its intended position.

**Q – I hit a great putt that would certainly have dropped if the hole was at its normal depth. My fellow competitors even agree! Can't I just mark myself down as having holed that putt?**

**A – No. Sorry!** The R&A have confirmed in their updated guidance on the Rules of Golf on 29<sup>th</sup> June that it is not in accordance with the Rules of Golf to treat a ball as holed when it bounced out of the hole for any reason (e.g. bouncing off the hole liner, or a tray attached to the flagstick). Likewise, it is also not in accordance with the Rules of Golf to treat a ball as holed if it is within a certain distance of the hole, or just if it strikes the flagstick (ie without the ball finishing at rest with some part below the level of the surface). It is also not allowed to have a hole liner sitting above the putting surface and treat a ball as holed if it strikes the hole liner.