

10 Commandments For Tournament Players

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As tournament season in the Northwest moves into full swing, here are 10 important considerations, commandments if you will, for contestants when preparing to play a competitive round. Each suggestion will assist you in avoiding Rules of Golf violations, which could ultimately result in a lower score.

1) Thou Shall Read the Entry Form

It may seem like a cumbersome formality, but golf associations and tournament committees usually take great care in writing the wording that is listed on the official entry form. This information usually includes more than just the cost to enter the event. It often includes "conditions of the competition" such as the dress code, format of play, whether or not the event is spikeless, and additional information of which you should be aware. After entering, most tournaments will send some sort of an acknowledgement to you with additional information. Read that too. If you do not receive such a notice shortly after entering, telephone or e-mail the event to make sure they received your entry.

2) Thou Shall Know Your Starting Time

Rule 6-3 says, "The player shall start at the time laid down by the Committee." It is your responsibility to know your starting time and the appropriate tee on which you are to start. It is always a good idea to check in with whomever is doing the starting at least 10 minutes ahead of your time to make sure everything is on schedule.

3) Thou Shall be on the Tee Ready to Play

If you are not on the tee, ready to play, at your assigned time, you run the risk of disqualification or at best a two-stroke penalty. And ready to play does not mean sauntering up to the tee as your name is called. If you show up more than five minutes late, you will probably be given directions to the "Dairy Queen" (DQ) and it won't be to get an ice cream cone.

4) Thou Shall Read the Local Rules Sheet

By arriving at the tee a few minutes early you will usually have an opportunity to read any printed Local Rules information and receive any necessary special instructions from the starter. Also, if the tournament has an official scorecard, take the time to review the back of it for additional Local Rules.

5) Thou Shall Mark and Identify Your Golf Ball

Upon arriving at the tee, you should determine with your fellow competitors or opponent the number and brand of golf ball each of you will be using. It is also strongly recommended that you place a unique, identifying mark of some kind on your golf ball prior to starting. A pencil or permanent marker usually does the trick. You may have a different ball from those in your group, but if someone from another group hits it into your fairway during the round, you will have a big problem if you cannot identify which ball is yours.

6) Thou Shall Count Your Clubs

Rule 4-4 makes it very clear that a player may not start with more than 14 clubs. Don't take for granted that is how many are in your bag, count them and do it just before starting. There are many colorful stories about how stray clubs unintentionally found their way into an unsuspecting bag and cost a player a two or even a four-stroke penalty in stroke play or loss of a hole or more in match play.

7) Thou Shall Carry a Rule Book

There simply is no excuse for not having one with you in your golf bag at all times. Sooner or later the time will come when you wish you had one and if you don't, it could be costly.

8) Thou Shall Say "Provisional"

If you think you may have lost a ball outside of a water hazard; Rule 27-2 is very specific about the proper procedure for playing a provisional ball. It says, "The player shall inform his opponent in match play or his marker or a fellow competitor in stroke play that he intends to play a provisional ball." It does not say he shall inform them that he is "reloading" or "hitting another ball." It specifically refers to the word provisional and you need to use it if you intend to put a provisional ball into play.

9) Thou Shall Keep Up With the Group in Front

Don't judge your pace of play on whether or not you are holding up the group behind you. You will avoid all pace of play violations if you simply keep up with the group ahead of you. It simply doesn't matter what is going on behind you if you are a hole or more behind.

10) Thou Shall Check Your Hole-By-Hole Scores

Don't just total up your scores and turn in your scorecard. Rule 6-6d specifically says, "The competitor is responsible for the correctness of the score recorded for each hole on his card." The total is irrelevant. The Rules do not even require you to write in a total. Make sure each hole score is correct and it is listed in the correct box before turning in your scorecard. And make sure you and your marker have each signed your card before you turn it in.