

Inclement Weather and Suspensions of Play (Selected extracts from the R&A Website)

A Committee must be prepared for inclement weather and players and those involved in running the competition must be able to recognise the signal that means that the Committee has suspended play. The situation where players do not know whether play has been suspended or not, or some players know and others don't, must be avoided. *(At FP, we will endeavour to sound a klaxon, otherwise someone will tour the course in person...)*

A competition need not be suspended simply on account of rain, unless the rain is so heavy that it would be unfair to require players to continue. **Generally, play should not be suspended unless the course has become unplayable, for example, balls are moving frequently on the putting greens due to wind or holes are surrounded by casual water.** In any event, if rain is of sufficient intensity to present an unfair condition, normally it would take little time for casual water to accumulate around the hole on at least one putting green. **When that occurs, the Committee would be remiss if it did not consider the course unplayable and suspend play.** If rain is not of sufficient intensity to present an unfair situation, but heavy enough to cause casual water around a hole, in match play the Committee may relocate the hole if a suitable area not under water can be found, and then resume play. However, in stroke play it is not permissible to relocate a hole unless it is severely damaged – see the Exception under Rule 33-2b. Accordingly, play cannot be resumed until the casual water problem is resolved.

Although a Committee should not suspend play unless absolutely necessary, it is the responsibility of the Committee to do everything possible to protect players from bad weather and lightning and, therefore, no chances should be taken in this respect. Although Rule 6-8b governs when play is suspended by the Committee, there is a Note to this Rule that states:

“The Committee may provide in the conditions of a competition (Rule 33-1), that in potentially dangerous situations, play must be discontinued immediately following a suspension of play by the Committee. If a player fails to discontinue play immediately, he is disqualified unless circumstances warrant waiving the penalty as provided in Rule 33-7.”

If the Committee introduces the condition for potentially dangerous situations, it overrides the provisions of Rule 6-8b in terms of discontinuance of play. This condition is in effect at all R&A Championships (see Appendix I, Part B in the Rules of Golf; page 144).

It is important to note that, while the Committee has the right to cancel a round in a stroke play competition, it may not do so in match play. If the players in a match have completed, for example, six holes, they must resume play at the 7th tee. The match is not replayed in its entirety.

[But note: there are differences of definition between ‘cancelling’, ‘suspending’, ‘rescheduling’ and ‘completing’ a round... (my italics)]

In stroke play, *[the following for information only: Winter League is Match Play...]* the Committee has the option of suspending play and resuming from where play was discontinued or cancelling the round and replaying it entirely. There is no hard-and-fast rule as to when a Committee should suspend play and when it should cancel the round in stroke play. However, generally a round should be cancelled only in a case where it would be grossly unfair not to cancel it. For example, if some competitors begin a round under extremely adverse weather conditions, conditions subsequently worsen and further play that day is impossible, it would be unfair to the competitors who started not to cancel the round (see Decision 33-2d/1).

When the course becomes unplayable and play is discontinued, the Committee should keep open as many options as possible to maximise the chances of completing the competition on schedule.

For example, consider these facts:

1. The field for the first two rounds of a 72-hole stroke play competition is 156, with the field being cut to 60 competitors for the last two rounds.
2. Due to the size of the field, the first two rounds are normally not completed until shortly before dark.
3. In the second round, a thunderstorm occurs in the middle of the day, rendering the course unplayable.
4. The delay because of the storm makes it impossible to complete the second round on schedule.
5. If the storm were to pass over quickly, it might be possible with the aid of squeegees and pumps to get the course playable and resume play for a couple of hours.

6. If play could be resumed for a couple of hours, it would be possible to finish the second round the next morning, quickly make the draw for the third round and finish the third round on schedule.

In these circumstances, it would be inadvisable for the Committee to suspend play for the day as soon as the storm rendered the course unplayable. In doing so, the Committee would be foreclosing an option, which if retained, might result in being able to finish the competition on schedule.

Generally, when more than half of the field have completed their rounds, it would be unusual to cancel the round if the opportunity is available to suspend play and continue the following day. However, it is appreciated that an 18 hole competition to be held over one day would not have this luxury of resuming play on a subsequent day. Where it is feasible to reschedule the competition, the Committee should endeavour to do so. However, the Committee does not have the authority under the Rules to reduce the number of holes of a stipulated round once play has commenced on that round (e.g. from 18 to 9 holes). Consequently, if it is not feasible to reschedule the competition, the competition must be cancelled.

It is not uncommon for problems to emerge in team matches where, because of bad weather, it is not possible to complete the matches in the format intended and, for whatever reason, there is insufficient extension time available to complete the matches. For guidelines as to procedure in these situations, see Appendix I.

Appendix I: Suspension of Play in Team Matches

Suspension of Play in Team Matches

Problems have emerged in team matches where, because of bad weather, it has not been possible to complete the matches in the format intended and, for whatever reason, no or insufficient extension of time is available.

There are many different forms which such matches can take, but perhaps one of the most common is a series of matches played over consecutive days with a set number of foursome or four-ball matches followed by twice that number of single matches. In such an event the Committee should reserve in the Conditions of Competition the right to achieve a result when play has been curtailed. The Committee could reserve the right to come to an equitable decision.

Similar problems arise in league matches where a match between two of the competing teams is curtailed and it is not possible to fix a date on which all members of both sides can resume play.

It must be stressed that in such a situation every effort should be made to find such a date, so that the match can be completed in accordance with Rule 33-2d. If, however, that proves impossible, then the choices open to the Committee are:

- i. The results of completed matches stand, and incomplete matches are declared null and void or treated as halved.
- ii. The results of completed matches stand and the incomplete matches are declared null and void, the Committee appointing a day on which they are to be replayed, with each team free to alter its original team, subject to the provision that no player who took part in a completed match may take part in any of the matches to be replayed; or
- iii. Declare the match null and void and appoint a day for it to be replayed with each team free to alter its original team.

The permutations are endless and the decisions to be made difficult and occasionally apparently unfair to somebody. The one common essential, however, is that the Committee reserves the right in the conditions of the competition to make a decision in equity when it is impossible to complete a match or series of matches in accordance with the Rules of Golf.

Extracts from the Rules of Golf and Decisions on Rules of Golf

(2-4 - Concession of Match, Hole or Next Stroke)

A player may concede a match at any time prior to the start or conclusion of that match.

A player may concede a hole at any time prior to the start or conclusion of that hole.

A player may concede his opponent's next stroke at any time, provided the opponent's ball is at rest. The opponent is considered to have holed out with his next stroke, and the ball may be removed by either side.

A concession may not be declined or withdrawn.

An agreement to halve a hole being played does not of itself constitute an agreement to waive the Rules.

However, if the players agree to consider a hole halved without either player making a stroke, they should be disqualified under Rule 1-3 for agreeing to exclude the operation of Rule 2-1 by failing to play the stipulated round.

However:

2-4/22 Players Agree to Concede Holes to Each Other

Q: Before or during a match, A and B agree to concede one or more holes to each other, thereby enabling them, in effect, to play a shorter match. If A and B know that such an arrangement is not permissible, are they subject to disqualification under Rule 1-3?

A: Yes. Although Rule 2-4 allows a player to concede a hole before playing it, an agreement between players to concede holes to each other exceeds this authority as it undermines the principle in Rule 2-1 of playing a stipulated round. **Therefore, such an agreement constitutes an agreement to waive the Rules.**

and further:

If players agree to play a match other than in the form prescribed in the conditions of the competition in order to decide which side will concede, **both sides should be disqualified under Rule 1-3 for agreeing to exclude the operation of a condition of competition (Rule 33-1).**

If the players agree to use some other method which does not involve playing a match to determine which side will concede, such as a putting competition, tossing a coin, etc., **they are not considered to be in breach of Rule 1-3.**

There is nothing in the Rules of Golf to prohibit players from agreeing to a method of determining which side will concede a match. **However, in view of the intention of Rule 1-3 (Agreement to Waive Rules), if players agree to play a match other than in the form prescribed in the conditions of the competition in order to decide which side will concede, both sides should be disqualified under Rule 1-3 for agreeing to exclude the operation of a condition of competition (Rule 33-1).**

33-7 - Disqualification Penalty; Committee Discretion

A penalty of disqualification may in exceptional individual cases be waived, modified or imposed if the Committee considers such action warranted.

Any penalty less than disqualification must not be waived or modified.

If a Committee considers that a player is guilty of a serious breach of etiquette, it may impose a penalty of disqualification under this Rule.