



2026 Rules Volunteer Training

Session 2



Agenda

- 2026 VSGA Hard Card
- Referee Positioning
 - Differences between Stroke and Match Play
- When to Intervene
- Giving the Ruling



VSGA Hard Card



Rules Official Resources

vsga.org/rulesofficials

- Volunteer Schedule
- 2026 VSGA Hard Card
- VSGA Pace of Play Policy
- Recordings

The screenshot shows the VSGA website's 'Rules Official Resources' page. At the top left is the VSGA logo. A navigation menu includes 'MEMBERSHIP', 'TOURNAMENTS', 'JUNIOR GOLF', 'VIP CARD', 'RESOURCE CENTER', and 'ABOUT'. The main heading is 'Rules Official Resources'. Below it, a sub-heading reads 'Below are resources for VSGA Rules Officials.' To the right, there are two circular images: one of a person in a golf cart and another of two people on a golf course. Underneath, the section 'Helpful Volunteer Documents' lists three links: '2026 Volunteer Schedule', '2026 VSGA Hard Card', and 'VSGA Pace of Play Policy'.



VSGA Hard Card

NEW – Immovable Obstructions Close Together

- Immovable obstructions within or adjacent to each other (e.g. scorecard length), including but not limited to sprinkler heads near putting greens, are considered to be a single obstruction.





VSGA Hard Card

NEW – Limited Free Relief from Immovable Obstruction in Penalty Areas (Model Local Rule F-24)

- Relief from interference by sprinkler heads and utility boxes within one club-length of the edge of the penalty area is allowed under Rule 16.1b, but only when the ball touches or lies on the obstruction or the obstructions interferes with the area of intended swing.



VSGA Hard Card

Model Local Rule F-24 Relief

- Reference Point: Nearest point of complete relief must be in the penalty area.
- Size of Relief Area: One club-length
- Limits on Location of Relief Area:
 - Must be in the penalty area in which the ball came to rest
 - Must not be nearer the hole than the reference point
 - There must be complete relief from all interference by the immovable obstruction



VSGA Hard Card

Immovable Obstructions Close to Putting Green (Model Local Rule F-5.2)

- This model local rule gives the player line of play relief for an immovable obstruction close to putting greens.
- Relief is allowed only when both the ball and the obstruction are in part of the general area cut to fairway height or less.





VSGA Hard Card

Model Local Rule F-5.2 Relief

- Relief from interference by an immovable obstruction may be taken under Rule 16.1.
- The player has an extra option to take relief when the immovable obstructions are on or close to the putting green and on the line of play:
- Ball in General Area. The player may take relief under Rule 16.1b if an immovable obstruction is:
 - On the line of play, and is on or within two club-lengths of the putting green, and
 - Within two club-lengths of the ball.



VSGA Hard Card

Temporary Immovable Obstructions (Model Local Rule F-23)

- Any air-circulation fans and tents on the course are temporary immovable obstructions. Relief procedure may be taken on either side of the TIO.
- When Relief is Allowed
 - Physical interference
 - Line of sight interference
 - Both physical and line of sight interference





VSGA Hard Card

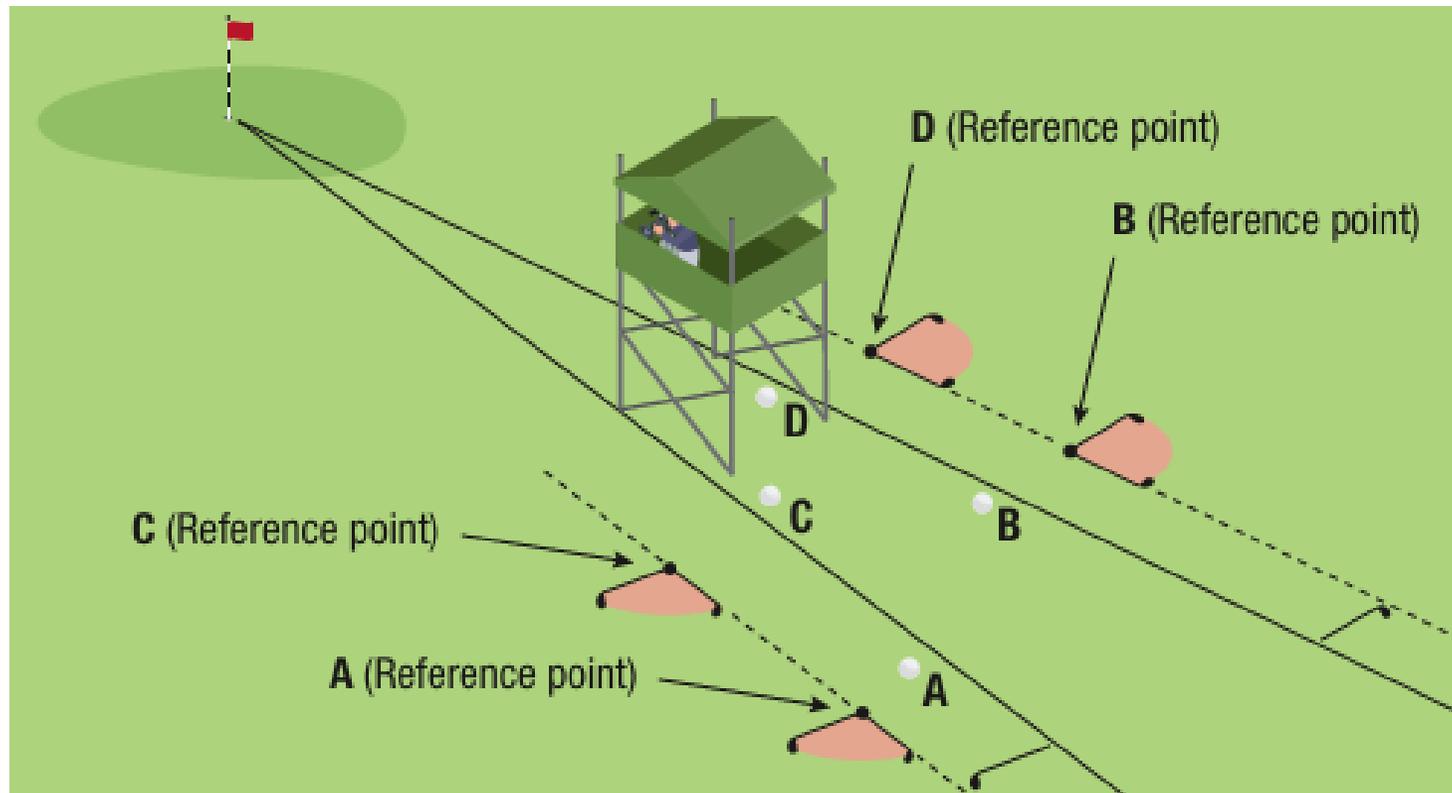
Model Local Rule F-23 Relief (General Area)

- Reference Point: The nearest point of complete relief where both physical and line of sight relief interference no longer exist.
- Size of Relief Area: The entire area within one club-length
- Limits on Location of Relief Area:
 - Must be in the general area
 - Must not be nearer the hole than the reference point
 - There must be complete relief from both physical and line of sight interference of the TIO



VSGA Hard Card

Model Local Rule F-23 Relief (General Area)





Questions





Referee Positioning



Being In Position - Overview

What Do We Mean By Positioning?

- In a place to help the player
- Still give adequate space
- Avoids imposing posture
- Appropriate match play referee positions
- No wasted steps





Referee Positioning

The Rules assume the honesty and integrity of the player, so while Referees are there to act on a breach, Referees do not need to hover or see every action taken by every player.

- Be positioned to help a player if needed
- Visible enough to be called in quickly, invisible enough to not be a distraction
- Give the player plenty of space before, during, and after a Ruling
- Don't make the player feel like they're being watched by "Big Brother"



Referee Positioning – Stroke Play

When positioned on a hole or in a zone, find the best spot

- Start by picking a spot where you can see as much as possible
- If covering multiple holes, find high ground or a space between holes where you can see multiple areas
- To help monitor POP, try to pick a spot where you can see the putting green and collect flagstick times and/or the tee of the next hole
- Over time, you may identify trouble spots where many rulings happen
- Avoid being in landing areas avoid being part of a ruling! Try to be short of or past landing areas.
- Make sure golf carts are kept well out of the way of errant shots.



Referee Positioning – Stroke Play

Be positioned so that players can readily identify you and you can assist.

- Try to keep golf carts pulled off the path away from play where you can face the fairway/tee/green.
- Avoid standing in fairways, bunkers, and on putting greens, unless absolutely necessary to make a Ruling.



Referee Positioning – Stroke Play

Be positioned so that players can readily identify you and you can assist.

- If a player looks like they may need assistance, stand up to make yourself noticeable. Potentially take a few steps toward the player.
- If you see a situation a player may need relief from, make yourself more visible, but do not be waiting at the situation for the player to approach.





Referee Positioning – Stroke Play

Stay aware of your surroundings and approach professionally.

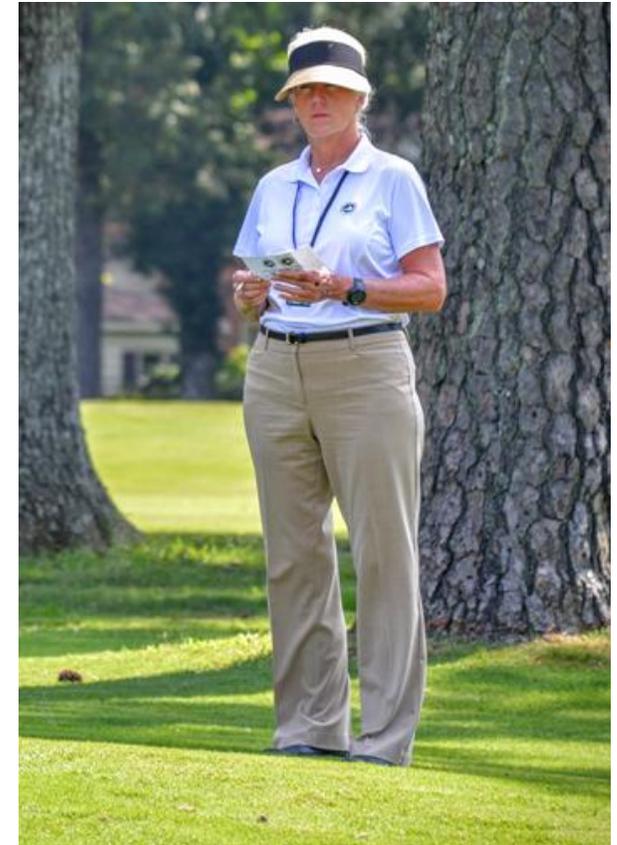
- Be calm and neutral going into a Ruling.
- If a player calls you over, walk into the situation.
 - Don't run or jog to the player, even if it a POP complication
- If you are too far away and walking will take too long, drive your cart toward the situation and park 15 yards away.
- Always be aware of other players in the group.



Referee Positioning – During a Ruling

While giving a ruling, make sure to give the player plenty of space.

- Avoid standing in or parking a cart in a potential relief area.
- Avoid getting too close to anything you could accidentally alter to affect the player's conditions
 - Such as low-hanging branches, loose impediments, deep grass, etc.





Referee Positioning – During a Ruling

While giving a ruling, make sure to give the player plenty of space.

- Give enough space for entire potential relief area
 - Position yourself closer to the hole where ball cannot roll.
- Stay out of bunkers unless absolutely necessary to make the Ruling
- Pick a position where you will be able to make a quick exit once the Ruling is complete.





Referee Positioning – Match Play

When assigned to a match, stay with the players.

- Walk back to all tees and be present with players throughout the hole so that you are readily available to assist.
- Avoid walking in bunkers or on the putting green unless absolutely necessary to make a Ruling or assist players.





Referee Positioning – Match Play

As you are moving around, plan for your next position.

- Avoid standing on the player's line (extension of their view past the hole)
- Avoid standing on an extension of the line of play behind the player
- Consider the position of all players and how your position may affect the next player to play
- Avoid moving around a lot. Pick a spot that will be out of the way and stay there if possible.



Referee Positioning – Match Play

As you are moving around, plan for your next position.

- If encouraging quicker pace of play, stay ahead of the match, but not too far ahead (about 10 yards)
- When in fairways, split the difference between two players
- Avoid criss-crossing
- Know your exits





Questions





When to Intervene



When to Intervene

The Rules are written assuming the honesty and integrity of players.

- The majority of competitive golf is played without a Referee observing the player's every action.
- These principles guide when a Referee should intervene in a ruling situation.





When to Intervene

- If the player waves you over
- If a call comes via radio that a player needs assistance
- If a player is about to breach a Rule, has breached a Rule, or is proceeding incorrectly
- If a player appears to be looking around for a Referee or doesn't appear to be handling the situation on their own.





When to Intervene

- If a player is searching for a ball, assist in the search even if not requested
 - Make sure you get a timer going for the search clock





When to Intervene – Match Play

In match play, when assigned to the match as a referee, there are additional intervening situations.

- Playing from Outside the Teeing Area
 - Before the player hits their tee shot, the referee should stop the player and have them move their ball.





When to Intervene – Match Play

In match play, when assigned to the match as a referee, there are additional intervening situations.

- Order of Play
 - Allow players to determine whose turn it is to play. If players ask for your assistance, make the determination.
 - Do not proactively declare who is away.
 - However, if a player is about to play out of turn without an agreement from the opponent, it is appropriate to intervene before they make a stroke.

When NOT to Intervene

- If the player is taking relief on their own correctly.
- If you see a player's ball in a potential relief situation, give the player time to assess the situation and consider their options before rushing in or offering to help.
- Referees are there to assist the player IF they need it.





When NOT to Intervene

- It is appropriate to stand up out of the golf cart or take a few steps toward a situation to be more visible and ready to assist if called.
- If you see a player's ball in a potential relief situation, do not wait next to the ball for the player to arrive.



How to Intervene

- **Set the tone as you approach the ruling** – be calm, open and keep your body language neutral. Take a deep breath as you approach the situation.
- **“How can I help?”** – when called into a ruling
- **“Sorry to interrupt. I’m the referee on the hole and thought you might have a Rules question.”** – when intervening on your own because players look confused
- **“Sorry to interrupt. I’m the referee on this hole and just want to make sure you’re taking the right drop. Can you walk me through what you did here?”** – when intervening on your own because a Rule may have been breached.
- Keep in mind that you are there to help, not accuse the player.



Body Language and Tone

Always be aware of what your body language may be communicating.

- Avoid standing too close to the player
- Generally, you can keep at least a few yards between you and the player at all times





Body Language and Tone

Always be aware of what your body language may be communicating.

- As you approach a situation, the player is most likely feeling anxious or on edge – try to de-escalate the situation if possible
- As you interact with a player, try to pick up on the tone of the situation



Questions





Giving the Ruling



Giving the Ruling – Get the Facts

- When entering a ruling situation, your first instinct may be to assume what is happening or what relief the player wants to take.
- Instead of assuming and jumping into relief options, take a step back and ask the player what they are trying to do.
- Start the interaction with “how can I help?” allows the player to tell you what they are trying to do and what the problem may be.
- You may need to gather more information without leading the player.



Giving the Ruling – Asking Good Questions

Depending on the situation, you may need to ask follow-up questions after being called into a ruling. Questions should be open-ended and not lead the player toward a particular answer.

- Where was the ball originally?
- Has anyone taken any action?
- Can you walk me through each step of what happened?
- Where were you when this happened?
- How did you determine that?



Giving the Ruling – Asking Good Questions

After asking questions, repeat back the important facts to confirm.

- You may have to wade through a lot of extra information to get the facts.
- “Just so I’m clear...”
- “To make sure we’re on the same page...”





Giving the Ruling – Be Direct

- Answer player's questions directly and concisely
- Answer the questions that are asked and avoid giving additional rules information (unless the player is likely to make a mistake)
- If the player asks about relief, you can ask if they would like all available options, but do not proactively give all available options in great detail
- Avoid "I think" or "You should" statements – let the player decide how to proceed





Giving the Ruling – Be Direct

- A ruling is not the time for Rules education
- Avoid “Rules-speak” whenever possible
 - **Use:** “Yes, you can move that twig.”
 - **Avoid:** “That twig is a loose impediment, and you are allowed to move loose impediments anywhere on the golf course, including bunkers.”
- Rules education phrases should also be avoided
 - Nearest, not nicest point of relief
 - $1+2=2$, calling a penalty a “discount”





Giving the Ruling – Penalties

- If a player gets a penalty, make sure the player is aware of the penalty and knows to include it on the scorecard.
- If the player is obviously aware of the penalty (such as penalty area relief), no need to tell the player of the penalty.
- Avoid any suggestion that the penalty is better than it could have been.



Giving the Ruling – Close it Out

- When the ruling is complete, close out the interaction.
- For example:
 - “Anything else I can help you with?”
 - “Alright, relief is complete.”
 - “You’re good to go.”
- Once complete, exit the ruling as quickly and quietly as possible.
 - Try to exit before the shot is hit, if possible





Questions

Session 3: Thursday, March 19th at 11 a.m.