

Rule Tin of the Week Artificial Intelligence

During the second round of the 2014 edition of The Barclays at The Ridgewood Country Club in Paramus, New Jersey, Phil Mickelson's drive ended up on an elevated platform within a hospitality area located about 50 yards up a hill to the left of the 5th green. Apparently, he enjoyed the experience so much that he opted for "seconds" and ended up on the same platform during the third round!

The hospitality area qualified, under the Rules, as a temporary immovable obstruction (TIO), i.e., a non-permanent artificial object erected in conjunction with the competition that was fixed and not readily movable. Other examples of TIOs are tents, scoreboards, grandstands, television towers and lavatories. By Local Rule, as set forth in Appendix I, Part B, Item 7 [Temporary Obstructions], Mickelson was entitled to relief from the hospitality area because his ball came to rest on the TIO and the hospitality area intervened directly between his ball and the hole on his line of play.



According to the Local Rule, Phil's procedure for obtaining relief from the TIO was to determine the point on the course nearest to where the ball came to rest on the TIO that (a) was not nearer the hole, (b) avoided interference and intervention, and (c) was not in a hazard or on a putting green. Then, Phil would have been required to drop his ball more than one club-length, but less than two club-lengths, from that point located to the side of the TIO.



With his "artificial intelligence," Phil realized that, if he opted to take relief from this TIO, he would be dropping in very tall grass. Thus, he decided to play his ball as it lay on the artificial surface. During the second round, his wedge shot from this perfect lie flew over the putting green and landed in a bunker, leading to a bogey for the hole. Mickelson fared better in the third round, wedging his ball onto the green from the artificial surface, and barely missed his birdie putt.

The adjacent photographs show Phil playing the wedge shot from the artificial surface during the second round, as well as the messages someone spray painted on the carpeting that recorded Phil's close encounters with the TIO.



One must not conclude from the foregoing that it is always permissible to play one's ball as it lies. In fact, during the second round of The Barclays, Seung-Yul Noh was assessed a two-stroke penalty for playing his ball as it lay on a wrong putting green. Noh's errant drive on the 11th hole sailed wide right and ended up on the 3rd green. After waiting for another group to putt out on the 3rd green, Noh made the mistake of playing his next shot from the green (see adjacent photograph).

According to Rule 25-3 [Wrong Putting Green], if a player's ball comes to rest on a wrong putting green, the player must take relief by dropping the ball within one club-length of, and not nearer the hole than, the nearest point of relief. The nearest point of relief must not be on the putting green or in a hazard.



