

HOW TO DETERMINE ORDER OF PLAY AROUND THE PUTTING GREEN

Rule 6.4 - Order of Play When Playing Holes

SCENARIO:

Ilene hits a beautiful golf shot and the ball nearly strikes the flagstick before rolling just off the back of green on hole # 9. Ilene is closer to the hole than Allison, Carol and Nora, with a straight, five-foot putt for birdie. Ilene should march up to the green and knock the ball in, right? Not so fast. Golf has rules for just about everything – including determining who putts first once all players are on or near the green.

QUESTION: Does the golfer who is *off* the green automatically play first?

ANSWER: Not necessarily. According to the United States Golf Association, the player in your group who is farthest from the hole – not the closest -- takes the next shot, meaning Ilene may have to wait a while before her putt.

One of the basic etiquette guidelines in golf—the golfer who is farthest from the hole plays first—still holds.

PENALTY:

Stroke Play – none **except** that if you and another player agree to play out of turn to give one of you an advantage, you both get the general penalty of **2 strokes**

Match Play – None **but** the opponent can require you to replay stroke

By Brent Kelley
Updated May 25, 2019

On, Off the Green Doesn't Really Matter—'Away' Plays First

This is a bit of golf etiquette that is frequently misunderstood by recreational golfers.

Everyone knows that the player who is "away" or "out" (meaning the golfer whose ball is farthest from the hole) plays first on each set of strokes. But when it comes to putting greens, many recreational players get the rule wrong. They believe that someone whose ball is *off* the green always plays before others whose balls are *on* the green. And that's incorrect.

It doesn't matter whether you're on the green or off. If you're farthest from the cup, then you play first. That means you might have to putt before your partner plays a shot, for example, from a bunker, *if* your putt is longer than your partner's bunker shot.

If your partner is short of the green, 30 feet from the cup, but you're on the green, 40 feet from the cup, you play first. *(If only our greens were that big)*

The golfer who is farthest from the cup plays first (see [Rule 6.4](#)), regardless of where that player is.

Is There a Penalty for Playing out of order In and On/Off Green Situation?

Keep in mind that a golfer who is on the green but farther from the cup than one who is off the green isn't necessarily *required* to play first. For example, a golfer may want extra time to read a lengthy putt while another who is closer but has an easy chip is ready to go. In a situation like that, the golfers might agree for the shorter shot to come first.

And note that in **stroke play**, there is no penalty for playing out of order (it's simply an issue of etiquette). If your group prefers the guy in the bunker play first, even though he's not out, that's fine. But the by-the-book procedure is for the player who is out to play first, even if that means putting before someone who is off the green plays their shot.

In **match play**, however, if you play out of order you are in violation of the rules. And your opponent can require you to replay the stroke, which they will certainly do if you happened to hit a great shot.

Playing 'Ready Golf' Removes Any Confusion About Order of Play Around Greens

A great way for recreational golfers to remove any doubt about the proper order of play, around greens or anywhere else on the course, is for the group to agree to play ready golf. "Ready golf" simply means play when ready. Don't worry about which golfer in the group is farthest away from the hole. If you're the first golfer in your group who is ready to play the next stroke, do so. Playing ready golf has a nice added benefit, too: It speeds up play around the golf course.

Rule 6.4

USGA Rule 6.4, Order of Play determines when players should hit their shots. However, the rule does allow for golfers to shoot out of turn. According to the rule, if the player farthest from the hole is not ready to play, he can ask another player to hit a shot or putt. In that circumstance, you could receive permission to hit your putt even though your ball is not farthest from the hole.

Etiquette

Knowledge of the rules is an important part of golf etiquette. Proper etiquette around the green is important because putting plays such a key role in the game. Because recreational players who shoot 90 to 100 might hit more than 30 putts during a round, proper decorum and order around the green are essential. The USGA notes that in addition to knowing when to putt, you should not step on the putting lines of fellow players. That means not walking across the imaginary line between a player's ball and the hole. Doing so can leave cleat marks that might affect a competitor's putt. If you determine you are not farthest from the hole, mark your ball with a plastic marker or coin and wait your turn.