



2025 Spring Sports – Golf Highlighted Rules & Addendums

General Format & Governing Rules

- USGA Rules govern all Special Olympics golf competitions, except where Special Olympics modifications apply.
- “Summer Rules” are in effect (i.e., no preferred lies unless specified by local course rules).
- Level of Competition (as described in 2023):
 1. Level 1 – Individual Skills Competition
 2. Level 2 – Unified Sports Alternate Shot (9-Hole)
 3. Level 3 – Unified Sports Alternate Shot (18-Hole)
 4. Level 4 – Individual Stroke Play (9-Hole)
 5. Level 5 – Individual Stroke Play (18-Hole)

Equipment & Uniform

- Golf Clubs: Must conform to USGA guidelines (no illegal clubs or equipment).
- Rangefinders: Allowed for distance measurement only; must not slow pace of play.
- Uniform: Appropriate golf course attire is required (collared shirt, no denim if course disallows it); check with the host course for specifics.
- Motorized Carts: Only permitted with prior medical or accessibility approval. Otherwise, all players are expected to walk.

Course & Tees

- The golf course shall be set up at the discretion of the Tournament Committee. It is recommended (but not mandatory) that positions of the tee box should:
 - Avoid any shots that require the golfer to carry a distance of greater than 47 meters (50 yards) over hazards or other obstacles, anywhere on the golf course.
 - Create holes that do not exceed following measurements:
 - Par 3: 137 meters (150 yards)
 - Par 4: 320 meters (350 yards)
 - Par 5: 434 meters (475 yards)
- Local Rules: Any additional local course rules (e.g., drop zones, ground-under-repair) will be explained before the round.

Scoring & The “10x” Rule

- Scoring:
 - Each competitor or team is responsible for keeping their group’s score (typically, you keep a fellow competitor’s card).
 - Special Olympics Competitions should also have a assigned volunteer scorekeeper for each event.
 - Announce your score immediately after holing out each hole.
 - Sign your scorecard at the end of the round—signed cards are final unless an official correction is made immediately.
- 10-Stroke (10x) Limit:
 - Once a player reaches 10 strokes on a hole, they must pick up and record a 10 (“10x”).
 - This keeps play moving and prevents delays.
- Breaking a Tie: First-place ties shall be decided in the following manner:
 - Of the teams tied for first place, the team with the fewest number of 10x scores shall be declared the winner.

Pace of Play

- Time Expectations:
 - 9-hole rounds should be completed in 2.5 hours or less.
 - 18-hole rounds should be completed in 5 hours or less.
- Ready Golf: Move quickly to your ball; be prepared to hit when it's your turn; limit practice swings.
- Warnings & Penalties: Officials may issue warnings for slow play; repeated violations can result in penalty strokes or moving your group to the correct position in the field.

Special Rules for Unified Play & Caddies

- Unified Partners:
 - Penalty strokes do not affect order of play. If the athlete hits OB or in a hazard, the partner still hits next shot.
 - Athlete tees off odd-numbered holes, Partner tees off even-numbered holes (or as specified by the event).
- Caddies:
 - May offer verbal advice, carry clubs, and perform normal caddie duties.
 - Cannot physically align or move the athlete into position.
 - Only one caddie may be with a player at a time.

Weather & Safety

- Suspension of Play: If lightning or severe weather is seen or heard, play is suspended immediately.
- Course Closure: Tournament officials or course personnel will decide if the round is halted or canceled.
- Local Safety Protocols: Always follow instructions from the competition director or local course marshals.
- Errant shots. Yell "FORE" when your ball may come close to someone or when it leaves the hole you're playing. When you hear "FORE," duck and cover your head with your arms and hands.
- Water safety. Stay away from the edges of the ponds.

Protest & Appeals

- Protest: Any protests must be lodged immediately following the incident or before the end of that round.
- Final Decision: The rules committee or head official's ruling is final.

Player Conduct & Etiquette

1. Keep up with the group in front of you. 9-hole rounds must be completed in 2 ½ hours or less, and 18-hole rounds must be completed in 5 hours or less. Learning how to play a golf course without delay is an important part of the Special Olympics golf experience.
2. Play "ready" golf. When you arrive at your ball, hit your next shot when it is safe to hit, be ready when it's your turn to hit, take fewer practice swings, go straight to your ball when it's safe to do so, and when at the green, leave your bag just off the fringe nearest the next tee.
3. Be respectful. Treat others as you want to be treated. DO NOT throw clubs, smash clubs into the ground, or curse out loud.
4. Identify your ball. Before you start your round, use a Sharpie to put an identifying mark on your golf ball so that you don't mistake it for someone else's.
5. Putting green etiquette. Avoid stepping on your own and your fellow competitor's putting line, avoid stepping near the hole, be very quiet when another player is putting, stand out of the line of sight of another player, and repair your ball mark plus one other.
6. Replace your divots. It is up to you to take care of the beautiful golf courses that we play.
7. Rake your bunkers. After you hit your shot out of a bunker, be sure to rake the sand smooth.
8. Just like a camper...Leave the golf course better than you found it!
9. Zero Tolerance: No alcohol, illegal drugs, or related infractions on the course at Special Olympics competitions.