



# A Guide to the Rules of Amateur Status Relating to Hole-in-one Prizes

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## Introduction

The Amateur Status Committee of The R&A has the task, in co-operation with other golfing bodies around the world, of maintaining the strength of amateur golf so that it can be enjoyed by participants at all levels, and kept as free as possible of the abuses which can come in the wake of uncontrolled sponsorship and financial incentive. It is necessary to safeguard amateur golf so that it may be fully enjoyed at Club and International level alike by people who play golf for pleasure, not for profit.

In furtherance of this, golf has a strict Amateur Code and this guide is designed to clarify the Rules as they apply to hole-in-one prizes. As various insurance schemes make it easier and cheaper to offer large prizes for a hole-in-one, it is more important than ever that golfers, organisers and sponsors of amateur events are aware of the limits on such prizes.

A hole-in-one is not considered to be purely a “lucky shot” and it is not similar to a lottery. A skilled player clearly has a greater chance of achieving a hole-in-one than a high handicap player. Consequently, Rule 3-2b of the Rules of Amateur Status provides that an amateur golfer must not accept a prize for a hole-in-one which has a retail value in excess of £500 or the local equivalent (or such a lesser figure as decided by the Governing Body). However, a prize within this limit may be accepted in addition to any other prize won in the same competition.

## When do the Rules apply?

The Rules of Amateur Status apply when such competitions take place on a driving range or some other area prepared for the purpose of playing golf, as well as on a golf course itself. However, the Rules do not apply to events at a fun fair or similar venue.

## Improper Prizes

A common example of an improper prize offered for achieving a hole-in-one is a car. If an amateur golfer wins such a prize he must make the choice between accepting the prize causing forfeiture of Amateur Status or refusing the prize enabling him to retain his Amateur Status. It is important to note that, in such cases where a player accepts an improper prize and subsequently applies for reinstatement he may be required to serve a period of up to two years awaiting reinstatement.

The Amateur Status Committee of The R&A takes the view that an amateur golfer should not be put in the awkward and embarrassing position of having to make such a choice. Therefore, the Committee is strongly opposed to the offering of excessive prizes for holes-in-one.

## Cash Prizes

Although Rule 3-1 prohibits an amateur golfer competing for prize money, if a cash prize is offered for a hole-in-one it is not considered that all those competing are in breach of Rule 3-1. However, it is considered that the player that accepts the prize would be liable for forfeiture of Amateur Status under Rule 3-1.

## Is there any way around the Rules?

An amateur golfer may retain his Amateur Status if he accepts an improper prize, but at the same time makes it a condition of his so doing that it is donated directly to a nominated and well known charity. It is important to note that if this is done the winner must not take possession of the prize.

Alternatively, a competition could be held on the basis that in the event of an amateur golfer achieving a hole-in-one, the improper prize is automatically donated to a charity. This has the benefit that the amateur golfer is not put in the awkward position of having to choose between accepting the improper prize and his Amateur Status. The amateur golfer can, in this instance, still be awarded a prize within the prize limits and significant positive publicity is generated for the Club hosting the event, the sponsor and the charity.

However, the following are considered to be attempts to circumvent the Rules. They are unacceptable and would cause a player to be in breach of Rule 3-2b:

1. Accepting an improper prize in a raffle or prize draw limited to players who had achieved a hole-in-one.
2. Accepting an improper prize in a quiz limited to players who had achieved a hole-in-one.
3. Awarding an improper prize to an associate of the person achieving a hole-in-one so that the player achieving the hole-in-one is not accepting the prize himself.

## Insurance Policies

An amateur golfer is traditionally expected to buy a round of drinks having holed-in-one and therefore he is quite entitled to insure himself against this eventuality, provided it is a genuine insurance policy and not part of a scheme to circumvent the prize Rule. It is important to distinguish this case from one where an insurance policy is the prize for a hole-in-one, which is not permitted.

## Conclusion

It is easy for an amateur golfer to overlook or forget the benefits of being an 'amateur', particularly when he is offered the keys to a new car for a hole-in-one. But acceptance of such a prize will have certain consequences which may cause him to regret his decision - his official handicap will lapse, any Club or Society of which he is a member may review his eligibility for continued membership and participation in amateur competitions is a thing of the past. The game that he used to enjoy so much may be changed significantly.

The danger of taking a more lenient attitude towards hole-in-one prizes is that this would almost certainly lead to a proliferation of such prizes, with the hole-in-one competition becoming more important than the main event. In addition, and as already mentioned, the high financial incentive to win such a prize may well give rise to abuses of the Rules of play in a game which currently benefits from being largely self-regulating.

Consequently, the Amateur Status Committee of The R&A holds the view that offering improper prizes for holes-in-one is contrary to the best interests of the game and seeks the continued support of all concerned with amateur golf competitions in keeping prizes offered within the Rules.



The R&A is golf's world rules and development body and organiser of The Open Championship. It operates with the consent of more than 130 national and international, amateur and professional organisations, from over 120 countries and on behalf of an estimated 30 million golfers in Europe, Africa, Asia Pacific and The Americas (outside the USA and Mexico). The United States The Golf Association (USGA) is the game's governing body in the United States and Mexico.

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