

Links Players

RECOVERING FROM OUT OF BOUNDS

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions (Psalm 51:1).

You know that feeling when you discover you've hit a ball out of bounds. I can only think of one other shot that comes remotely close to one hit out of bounds. You know the unmentionable one. It begins with the letter S and ends with the letter K. If your friends are like mine, I am not allowed to utter it. Even my Christian friends, who aren't superstitious, refuse any mention of this shot. Ok, back to the out-of-bounds issue.

The ruling for competitive play is still stroke and distance. The latter half of Rule 18 reads as follows: "... the player must resume that progression by playing again from where the previous stroke was made."

As we have all personally experienced, that walk back to the tee box to "resume that progression" is certainly a lonely walk. We have all flared one high and right or snapped one dead left, haven't we? Those little white stakes carry quite a punch, usually landing square in the solar plexus. Personally, I have had some of the highest moments of my life on golf courses, but, like you, I have also had my fair share of "lonely walks."

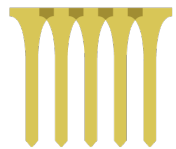
We have all—every one of us—hit it, as some describe it, "Oscar Bruno." We all know the concept of "stroke and distance." Doesn't that seem overly punitive? I mean, how about just a "stroke," like the penalty for lateral hazards? We can moan all we want, but the rule is the rule. Have you ever stopped to consider that this rule, along with most of the others under which we play this marvelous game, is there for your ultimate good?

I know it never seems like it in the moment, with all the higher scores and the "lonely walk," but I suggest a case be made that the "dreaded out of bounds" can make you a better player.

God often withdraws his presence when we persist in sin. Of course, he never withdraws his love or salvation from those who are "in Christ," but he will create relational space between himself and his children precisely because of his grace and love.

Consider this analogy. I still remember the late Ben Hogan making an argument that perimeter-weighted clubs were ruining the game. His point was simple. Forged clubs require a center strike for the ball to achieve the intentions of the player. No doubt some of you remember certain forgings that had sweet spots the size of a pinhead. Hogan's point was that off-center hits, in addition to rattling the hands, were not only errant, but they also gave "feedback." That is, every time the player missed his shot, either subconsciously or consciously, his brain was being trained to achieve more precision.

Hogan lost the outcome of that argument, and most of us are eternally grateful. However, I think he won the logic of the argument if we restrict it to the point he was endeavoring to make—error can lead to improvement. Similarly, every time we knock it O.B., our inner golfer knows to make adjustments to prevent it from happening again. Those adjustments might take time, but the pain of "stroke and distance" has a way of teaching us incalculably valuable lessons.



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As the old adage goes, “What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.” In other words, what is true in golf oftentimes is true in life. When we, like David, transgress the boundaries of God’s commands, we experience the pain of a “lonely walk.” God often withdraws his presence when we persist in sin. Of course, he never withdraws his love or salvation from those who are “in Christ,” but he will create relational space between himself and his children precisely because of his grace and love.

This distance helps us hunger and thirst for him again. God gave us boundaries for our good. And by his marvelous grace and enabling power, we learn to live by them.

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Dennis Darville

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