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Golf Tip:

In Or Out With The Flagstick?

◆ By Brian McDonald, PGA of Canada

Question:

I've been a local club member for a long time, and I would like to know if there are any advantages to either leaving the pin in the hole or taking it out when chipping or putting from just off the green. My playing partners seem to have a different opinion, but I'd like to get your thoughts. ~ Andy B.

Thanks for the question, Andy! According to the rules of Golf, when your ball comes to rest just off the putting surface, you have the option of leaving the flagstick in the hole or taking it out. With most of these shots, you will choose a putter or use a #7 or #8 iron to chip the ball. To date, scientific research conducted by experts has proven inconclusive. However, let me weigh the pros and cons of both approaches in different scenarios:

Pull the Flagstick

Pros: When taking the pin out, it clears the pathway to the bottom of the cup without any obstruction, and the ball can fall freely into the hole.

Cons: When the pin is pulled, a ball moving slightly too fast can roll right over the cup. We call this the cellophane bridge.

Leave the Flagstick

Pros: An advantage of leaving the pin in is that your ball may hit the flagstick and go in the hole; it's a rare occurrence, but it is physically possible. The pin can help slow down a ball that is rolling too fast and only help a poorly struck shot. Additionally, the pin will serve as a "goalie" if you are going severely downhill on a fast green.

Cons: Not taking the pin out can cause the ball to deflect away from the cup, and keep it from falling in. There would be less of a void for the ball to fall into.

Circumstances Where I Pull the Flagstick

- When I have a nice to perfect lie
- If I truly think I must make it
- When I'm going uphill

And Others When I Leave the "Goalie" In

- When I have a bad lie and fear the outcome
- When the "goalie" can help stop the ball
- When I'm going downhill

My advice, Andy: If you think the flagstick will hurt, pull it! If not, leave it in.

If you have any questions about your game or if there's a particular golf topic that interests you, please email bmcDonald@bestversionmedia.com.

Brian McDonald has been a golf professional and PGA of Canada member since 1982."