

## Provisional ball? Second ball? There is a difference

By JEFF BOYER  
SCGA Assistant Director  
Rules and Competitions

Once in awhile in every-one's golf game there comes a time when you just don't quite know how to proceed. When that happens, you may need to play a *provisional ball* or a *second ball* — but you need to know the differences in each of these actions. They are definitely not the same.

"A provisional ball," says the *Definitions of The Rules of Golf*, "is a ball played under Rule 27-2 for a ball that may be lost outside a water hazard or may be out of bounds."

That's the first condition to note: the original ball might be out of bounds, or lost outside of a water hazard. A player may not play a provisional ball for a ball that might be in a water hazard.

The procedure outlined in Rule 27-2 is specific as to how and when you may play a provisional ball: "The player must inform his opponent in match play or his fellow competitor in stroke play that he intends to play a provisional ball and he must play it before he or his partner goes forward in search of the ball."

Before you play a provisional, you must announce clearly what you're doing. Decision 27-2a/2 notes that phrases such as "That might be lost. I am going to reload" don't meet the test. "The player's statement," says the decision, "must specifically mention the words 'provisional ball' or must make it clear that he is proceeding under Rule 27-2a."

The reason for the "going forward" clause is simple. Because the primary purpose of a provisional ball is to speed play and avoid players having to return to the spot from which they played their original ball, it makes little sense for a player to go forward and then come back to play a provisional.

What happens if you either fail to announce that you're playing a provisional or go forward and then come back? That "provisional" you hit is now the ball in play with the appropriate stroke and distance penalty.

Whereas a provisional ball can be played in either stroke play or match play, a *second ball* (Rule 3-3) is permissible in stroke play only and is most often used in tournament play.

Rule 3-3 states, "In stroke play, if a player is doubtful of his rights or the correct procedure during the play of a hole, he may, without penalty, complete the hole with two balls."

"After the doubtful situation has arisen and before taking further action, the competitor must announce to his marker or a fellow-competitor that he intends to play two balls and which he ball he wishes to count if the Rules permit.

"The competitor must report the facts of the situation to the Committee before returning his scorecard. If he fails to do so, he is disqualified."

One example: you hit your ball onto a hard-packed dirt and gravel cart path. If the cart path is considered "artificial," you're entitled to relief, but if it's deemed to be an integral part of the course, you get no relief. There's no Rules official in sight.

Under 3-3, you announce to your fellow competitor that you're going to play a second ball and which ball you want to score with (presumably the ball you're dropping away from the cart path). You then finish the hole with both balls and report the situation at the score table before you sign and turn in your scorecard.

Why is this rule for stroke play only? Match play is played by holes and it's imperative that both players know the status of the match at all times, as that may influence how the match proceeds. Thus opponents must settle rules questions and claims as they arise, rather than waiting for a later determination.

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