

## Provisions of the *Provisional Ball* rule

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**H**ave you searched for a golf ball, couldn't find it, and then declared, "I'm going to play a provisional"? I've seen it many times on the course and I can't believe how many players think they can go "back" and play a provisional after searching. Unfortunately when you go back and play a stroke from the spot where you last played, you are not playing a provisional ball; instead, you are putting another ball into play under penalty of one stroke.

So let's bring further clarity to the provisional ball rule and offer some reminders for players when proceeding under this rule.

The provisional ball rule is in the book to help save time and speed up play. The last thing the USGA and Royal & Ancient want is to have a golfer strike a 250 yard drive towards an out-of-bounds area, walk up to where the ball lies only to find it out of bounds, and then have to walk all the way back to the tee to replay. So we recommend you play a provisional ball if there is ever any doubt that your ball may be lost or out of bounds and thus avoid one of golf's so-called *walks of shame*.

However, look at the definition: a provisional ball 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. If there is reasonable evidence your ball is in a water hazard, you cannot play a provisional ball (refer to Decision 27-2a/2). You must proceed under the water hazard rule (Rule 26). Many players get confused on this issue. If you hit your ball towards a water hazard, you need to ask yourself, "Is there anywhere that ball may be lost outside the water hazard?" If there is a possibility it may be lost somewhere outside the water

hazard, you are allowed to play a provisional, and we recommend you play one. If you then find your original ball in the water hazard, you must abandon the provisional and proceed with the original (Dec. 27-24/2.5).

So how do you play a provisional properly? It's fairly simple; however, there is a procedure that all players must follow: the player must inform his opponent or fellow-competitor that he intends to play a provisional ball and the player must play it before he

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or his partner goes forward to search for the original. If the player fails to announce properly or doesn't make any type of announcement and plays another ball, that ball is not a provisional ball but becomes the ball in play under penalty of one stroke and the original ball is lost.

Let's break down this procedure a little further. What is meant by "announce properly"? The rules are fairly strict on this interpretation. Decision 27-2a/1 states that the player must say the word "provisional ball" or must make it clear he is proceeding under Rule 27-2a. You can't say "I'm going to re-load" or "That could be gone, I'm going to hit another." Those statements don't constitute playing a provisional; neither does not saying anything at all. If you really want to impress your friends on how much of a Rules guru you are, just state, "I'm playing a ball under Rule 27-2a." That should impress them enough to automatically crown you the "Rules guy" in your group.

Decision 27-2a/1.5 clarifies what constitutes "going forward to search." The Committee must consider all the facts in determining whether the player actually went forward to search. This provision should not be so narrowly interpreted to preclude a player from playing a provisional ball even though he may have gone forward to retrieve another club or ball.

When does the provisional ball become the ball in play? The Definition of "Lost Ball" states that if the original ball is out of bounds or lost (including not identifying the original after five minutes of searching), the provisional ball becomes the ball in play under penalty of one stroke. More, if the player makes a stroke at the provisional from a place where the original is likely to be or from a point nearer the hole than that place, the original ball is considered lost and the provisional becomes the ball in play under penalty of one stroke.

### **About that Rules exam**

Two questions on the Rules exam in FORE's March/April issue had SCGA members scratching their heads.

In Question #4, the club was damaged in the morning round during the normal course of play (Decision 4-3/1). During that round, the player could have repaired or replaced the club or used the club in its damaged condition. However, the question stated that the player showed the Rules official the club during the afternoon round (a second stipulated round). Therefore, he started the second round with a non-conforming club in his bag and the answer is disqualification (Rule 4-1).

Question #9 refers to a match play scenario so there is no penalty (Rule 19-5). Notice the question says "striking his opponent's ball." Opponent is a term used in match play only, while fellow-competitor is a term used in stroke play only. If the question was referring to a stroke play situation there is a two stroke penalty on Gary.