

PROVISIONAL BALL - Rule 27

Provisional Ball Basics – If you believe your ball is lost *outside a water hazard* or is out-of-bounds you may play a Provisional ball from the spot where the original ball was last played. You must announce your decision and play before you or your partner goes to search for your original ball. USGA permits Courses to adopt a Local Rule permitting Provisional Balls on Water Hazard Holes – so check when on other courses.

The story of Ann, Betty, Carol and Darcy will illustrate the most common circumstances involved in playing a provisional ball. All four women have handicaps in the mid-twenties – pretty good golfers but who still make some bad shots.

The hole is par 5 where the fairway starts very narrow but widens about 100 yards out. But before that, there is a sharp drop off to the right leading to an area of bushes, grassy areas, and finally, an out-of-bounds fence. Because of the bushes it can be hard to tell if a badly sliced ball may be lost or out-of-bounds, but from past experience the players know that a ball hit into this area has about equal chances of being just fine, unplayable, or out-of-bounds.

Ann, the first player, sends a nice drive down the middle, but Betty slices her's over the bushes and into the bushy area. Somewhat like 'Monkey See, Monkey Do', Carol and Darcy also slice their tee shots. Because the balls may be lost or out-of-bounds, all three are entitled to hit a provisional ball.

Betty tees up another ball, but says she has a bad knee and doesn't want to climb down the slope, so the ball she is about to hit will be her ball in play, and she is abandoning the original one. Her new drive is stright. It counts as stroke #3 and comes to rest near Ann's ball.

Carol declares that she will hit a provisional ball, and really wacks the ball sending it straight down the fairway, her best drive of the day, if not of the season. (With the penalty stroke, it will be stroke #3 if used.)

Darcy attempts to do what Carol did, but instead her mighty swing pulls her off balance and the ball pops up, landing just in front of the teeing area. Impulsively, Darcy walks up to the ball, driver in hand, and hits it again. Deep grass and the wrong club doom this shot (Darcy's 4th stroke) and it only goes a little way. Now thoroly rattled, Darcy shanks shot #5, but it hits a tree and comes back toward her. She takes a deep breath and finally hits a decent shot which ends up near both Ann and Betty's ball. She now lies 6, shooting 7.

(Darcy was able to continue hitting her provisional ball until she came to the point where her original ball is likely to be. Then she is expected to look for her original ball. If she continues to hit the provisional ball past that point, the original ball is deemed to be lost, and is out of play.)

As the women start down the path to the bushy area two balls are quickly seen to be in fine shape, and the other one is soon found mostly under a bush. One of the 'good' balls is Betty's. She sighs and tells the others to pick up her ball – she had abandoned it. The other 'good' ball is Darcy's and she is exstatic! Taking a 7 iron she sends the ball back to the fairway where it lands near Ann and Betty's balls. She lies 2, and all those horrible shots with the provisional ball are gone from the record!

Carol is the real loser here. Her ball is half way under a bush, and she can either take a wack at it (possibly making things worse); call it unplayable and (a) drop it within two club lengths no nearer the hole; or (b) return to the tee and hit another drive. The 3rd option for an unplayable lie (dropping a ball behind the bush) is not fesible due to the nearby boundry fence. What she CANNOT do is use her provisional ball. Once her ball was found in-bounds, the provisional ball faded as did Darcy horrible shots.

Although I promised not to go into 'what ifs' and 'odd circimstances' there is one well known story that ties in with Carol's plight. That is in attachment #2 to this email.

End Point: **Ann** lies 1, shooting 2 - **Betty** lies 3, shooting 4 – **Carol** either tries shot #2 or calls the ball unplayable and hits shot #3 from the tee or 2 clubs lengths from where the ball lay. **Darcy** hit her drive into the bushy area, but sent her 2nd shot up to the fairway, so she lies 2 shooting 3. *[Had Darcy's original ball been out-of-bounds or lost and she had to use her provisional ball then the count would have been: shot #3 (the provisional), #4 popped up, #5 was the shank, and #6 was the decent shot that ended up near Ann & Betty's balls so Darcy would be shooting 7.]*

THE ODD TWIST

Remember that Darcy was able to hit her provisional ball until it reached the point where her original ball was likely to be, but if she had continued to hit the provisional ball past that point, the provisional ball would be the ball in play and the original ball would be deemed to be lost/abandon.

In a tournament some years ago Phil Mickelson decided to use that rule to his advantage. He hit his original drive into a canyon and took a provisional ball which he hit nicely down the fairway. Mickelson decided he was better off with the provisional ball lying three in the fairway.

He couldn't just say "I'm abandoning my original ball" *after* declaring the other ball a Provisional Ball, so he walked quickly up the fairway and was just about to hit his provisional ball, which of course was well beyond the spot the original ball probably lay.

BUT, a Tournament Marshal ran up and found Mickelson's original drive and yelled "I'VE FOUND YOUR BALL!" All Mickelson could do is go identify the ball, and hope it wasn't his. But it was.

Now Mickelson was in Carol's spot. The Provisional Ball no longer mattered. Mickelson could either attempt to play the original ball or call it unplayable and take 2 club lengths relief (not nearer the hole); drop a ball behind the point where the ball lay, keeping that point directly between the hole and the spot on which the ball is dropped, with no limit on how far behind that point the ball may be dropped; or return to the tee and hit another drive, either way with a 1 stroke penalty. Mickelson chose to go back to the tee, and I am sure he was thinking so not-so-nice thoughts about the eager Tournament Marshal.