RULE OF THE MONTH – AUGUST 2026

Scenario 1

Joe tees off on hole #4. The drive goes right and Joe thinks it may have gone out of bounds. He declares loudly he is playing a "provisional" ball--the first was a Titleist, the second is a Srixon. Darn, the second shot goes right too. He and his buddies get to the area where the ball(s) landed and determine both balls are out of bounds.

Joe states that since both balls are out of bounds and the second ball was declared a provisional ball, he will use Local Rule E-5 to move his **original** ball to the edge of the fairway with a penalty of 2 strokes, making the drop for 3 and hitting shot number 4. Is this correct?

Answer

No, this is not correct. Once Joe finds the **original** ball out of bounds, that ball is out of play. Now he has 2 options: 1) Return to the tee box and play shot number 5 or
2) Invoke rule E-5 and take his provisional ball to the edge of the fairway and play shot number 6.

18.3 Provisional Ball

a. When Provisional Ball Is Allowed

If a ball might be *lost* outside a *penalty area* or be *out of bounds*, to save time the player may play another ball provisionally under penalty of *stroke and distance* (see Rule 14.6). This includes when:

- The original ball has not been found and identified and is not yet *lost*,
- A ball might be *lost* in a *penalty area* but also might be *lost* somewhere else on the *course*, or
- A ball might be *lost* in a penalty area but might also be *out of bounds*.

If a player makes a *stroke* from where the previous *stroke* was made with the intent of playing a *provisional ball*, but a *provisional ball* was not allowed, the ball played is the player's ball *in play* under penalty of *stroke and distance* (see Rule 18.1).

If a *provisional ball* itself might be lost outside a *penalty area* or be *out of bounds*:

- The player may play another *provisional ball*.
- That *provisional ball* then has the same relationship to the first *provisional ball* as the first one has to the original ball.

Scenario 2

Joelle tees off on number 4. Her drive goes left into the native area before the ditch. She does not play a provisional ball at this time, as she expects to find her ball. Her group drives out to where they think the ball went into the native area, but they are unable to find it. Joelle decides to go back to the tee box to hit another ball (stroke and distance, hitting 3) instead of taking a lost ball penalty (hitting 4) and hits a great shot into the fairway. As she was driving back to the tee, her playing partners find her original ball, so she proceeds to play the found ball from the native area and picks up her "provisional." Is this correct?

Answer

No, this is not correct. Once the search is complete after 3 minutes, the original ball is out of play. Joelle cannot declare a ball "provisional" after returning to the tee. Even if

Caterpillar: Confidential Green

the first ball is found after being deemed lost, it cannot be played and the golfer must play the second tee shot.

18.3 Provisional Ball

a. When Provisional Ball Is Allowed

If a ball might be *lost* outside a *penalty area* or be *out of bounds*, to save time the player may play another ball provisionally under penalty of *stroke and distance* (see Rule 14.6). This includes when:

- The original ball has not been found and identified and is not yet *lost*,
- A ball might be *lost* in a *penalty area* but also might be *lost* somewhere else on the *course*, or
- A ball might be *lost* in a penalty area but might also be *out of bounds*.

b. Announcing Play of Provisional Ball

Before the *stroke* is made, the player must announce to someone that they are going to play a *provisional ball*:

- It is not enough for the player only to say that they are playing another ball or is playing again.
- The player must use the word "provisional" or otherwise clearly indicate that they are playing the ball provisionally under Rule 18.3.

If the player does not announce this (even if they intended to play a *provisional ball*) and plays a ball from where the previous *stroke* was made, that ball is the player's ball *in play* under penalty of *stroke and distance* (see Rule 18.1).

But if there is no one nearby to hear the player's announcement, the player may play the *provisional ball* and then inform someone of their actions when possible to do so.

c. Playing Provisional Ball Until It Becomes the Ball in Play or Is Abandoned

(2) **When Provisional Ball Becomes Ball in Play**. The *provisional ball* becomes the player's ball *in play* under penalty of *stroke and distance* in either of these two cases:

- **When Original Ball Is Lost Anywhere on Course Except in Penalty Area or Is Out of Bounds**. The original ball is no longer *in play* (even if it is then found on the *course* after the end of the three-minute search time) and is now a *wrong ball* that must not be played (see Rule 6.3c).

Caterpillar: Confidential Green