

## Marking the Position of a Ball

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The position of a ball must be marked if it is lifted under a Rule that requires it to be replaced. This simple act occurs many times during a round, mostly on the putting green, and the question often arises about what to do if something troublesome happens such as moving the ball or the ball-marker during the process of marking, lifting or replacing.

Rule 20-1 tell us that there will be no penalty if the movement of the ball or ball-marker is “directly attributable to the specific act” of marking the position of or lifting the ball or replacing it. As an example, if the marking object, say a coin in the player’s hand, were to cause the ball to move either when placing the coin or lifting it, then there would be no penalty and the ball must be replaced.

The quoted phrase from the Rule is very restrictive in that any accidental movement of the ball or the ball-marker that occurs before or after this specific act, such as dropping the ball or ball-marker, regardless of the height from which it was dropped, is not considered to be “directly attributable” and would result in the player incurring a penalty stroke. This is because the Rule contemplates that the ball-marker will remain in place until the ball is properly replaced in its original position.

The phrase, “directly attributable to the specific act,” should not be confused with a similar phrase, “in the process,” which is not found in the Rule. In the past, some players have mistakenly thought that since they were in the process of replacing the ball when the movement of the ball-marker occurred, there would be no penalty. This happened to P.H. Horgan at the 1996 Nike Shreveport Open. Horgan finished regulation play in a tie for first place and was waiting on the first tee for a play-off to begin when he casually mentioned that he had accidentally dropped his ball while replacing it and caused his ball-marker to move during the third round. He signed his scorecard without including a penalty stroke for causing the ball-marker to move because he thought that his being in the process of replacing the ball relieved him of penalty. He was disqualified for signing an incorrect scorecard.

A few years later, Oliver Wilson, the British Walker Cupper, when playing for Augusta State University in the Duke University Fall Golf Classic, was more fortunate when he dropped his ball on his ball-maker and caused the marker to move. He called over a passing Rules official to confirm that he had not incurred a penalty because he was in process of replacing his ball when he dropped it from just a few inches above his marker, causing the marker to move. He was disappointed to learn that he indeed had incurred a one stroke penalty, since dropping the ball was not considered a part of the specific act of replacing of the ball. He missed out on a play-off for the individual championship by a single shot. The good news is that he won the event outright the next year.