

When May a Player Change His Mind?

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Occasionally, a player might lift his ball in play, intending to proceed under a Rule, and have second thoughts about what he should do. If he does change his mind and proceeds differently than his original intentions, there is the possibility of incurring a penalty. The following several situations clarify some of the variables involved for a player in a stroke play competition.

If a player's ball lies on a cart path, he is normally entitled to free relief. If he doesn't think the situation through before lifting the ball, he might find that his nearest point of relief is in a bush or that the ball when dropped could come to rest in an unplayable position. If he does drop the ball and it is unplayable in its new location, then he may deem the ball unplayable there with a penalty of one stroke and the reference point for taking relief would be the new position of the ball. On the other hand, after initially lifting the ball and before dropping it, he may replace it on the cart path and play it from there but this action would entail a penalty of one stroke. So it pays to consider these possibilities before lifting the ball.

If he takes relief from the cart path, drops the ball properly and it comes to rest in an unplayable position, he might want to replace the ball to its original position on the cart path. However, that is not permitted and if he does so and plays the ball, he would incur a penalty of two strokes, a hefty price in this instance for changing his mind after dropping the ball.

Suppose that he takes relief from the cart path and drops the ball at a spot nearer the hole than the nearest point of relief. If he plays the ball, he would incur a penalty of two strokes. Prior to playing the ball, if he discovers that the ball is in a wrong place, he may lift the ball without penalty and drop it properly. He may not lift the ball and replace it on the cart path without penalty. There are two major points to remember here: [1] a ball incorrectly dropped in a wrong place but not played may be lifted without penalty and the player must then proceed correctly, and [2] once a player has put a ball into play under an applicable Rule, in this case the obstruction Rule, he must continue under that Rule until he has correctly put a ball into play.

Another situation worth considering is that where a player deems his ball unplayable and lifts it only to discover that the ball was lying in an area of unusual damage that has been marked as ground under repair. May he change his mind, avoid the penalty of one stroke as called for by the unplayable ball Rule and take free relief using the ground under repair Rule? Yes - in this situation he is not committed to proceeding under the unplayable ball Rule provided he has not put a ball into play under that Rule. In the special situation where the player drops the ball after deeming it unplayable and it comes to rest in the ground under repair, he could then take free relief from the ground under repair but still will incur the penalty of one stroke as called for by the unplayable ball Rule.