



Instructions regarding playing a provisional ball—For MHSAA Golfers

You may only play a provisional ball if you think your original ball may be out of bounds or lost outside a Penalty Area. Please play a provisional whenever you think this may be the case. This rule is designed to save time and eliminate the need to walk back to the spot where you played from previously, if you can't find your original ball. If need be, you can continue to play additional provisional balls—declare each time you do.

Note that when your ball is lost outside of a Penalty Area or out of bounds the penalty is harsh. You must return to the previous spot and play again, adding one penalty stroke plus count the two strokes you have made. Use of a provisional ball allows you to have a ball in play without going back to that spot. It does not reduce the penalty—it just saves time.

Do NOT play a provisional ball if you know that your ball is in a Penalty Area. However, you will not have breached this condition if you did not know (when you hit your original ball) that the area where your ball landed was a Penalty Area. There will be times, based on the topography, when you are uncertain whether your ball landed in 'bad country' or if it went into a Penalty Area. Remember that you must know or be virtually certain that the ball is in the Penalty Area before you can proceed under the Penalty Area rule (Rule 17). Without this certainty, if you can't find your ball, you must treat the ball as lost outside the Penalty Area and proceed under the stroke and distance penalty (Rule 18).

You MUST do the following if you are going to play a provisional ball:

Announce what you are doing to the fellow competitors in your group. You MUST say these words: I am going to play a provisional ball. Note that saying something else will not suffice. I SUGGEST that you say the following enhanced version (this will protect you even more): **I am going to play a provisional ball, in case my original ball is either out of bounds or it is lost outside of a Penalty Area. My first ball was a Callaway #3 with my mark, this ball is a Nike #4 with my mark.**

You MUST play the provisional before you go forward to look for your original ball. The rule allows you to walk forward and search for your ball and still go back and play a provisional ball if the three minutes has not elapsed, but remember, it's designed to save time. Please, play a provisional whenever there is a chance that your ball will be OB or lost. Note that you may continue to play the provisional ball until you reach a point where your original ball is likely to be. Stop before you go further and begin your search.

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT—if you find your original ball within three minutes of when you begin to look for it and it is in bounds—you CANNOT use or play the provisional, no matter what. You MUST abandon the provisional and proceed with your original ball in this case.

You do not have to look for your original ball. And you can quit looking for your ball before the three minute time limit is up. However, you CANNOT declare your ball lost. If a spectator, another player, or anyone finds a ball within the three-minute time limit, you are obligated by rule to check the ball and if you find it as yours—play it (again abandoning the provisional). You can ask people not to search for your ball and hopefully they will honor your request. However, they do have the right to search if they want to do so.

The clock starts for the three minute search time limit when you, your caddie, or your partner begins to search for the ball. Any other people may search before you, your caddie, or your partner get to the area where the ball is likely to be, and this will not count in the three minute time limit.

AGAIN, use this rule to save time. If you have not fallen asleep reading all of this, then I hope you will read the definition of a lost ball (page 246 of your rule book) and read all of Rule 18. That rule explains the penalty for a ball that is lost or out of bounds and the penalty if you do not follow the items above that have the word "MUST".

Play well and enjoy this great game.

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