Hi Guys,

First, please do not "reply all" to these emails unless there is a question that applies to everyone, and you think it needs to be discussed. If you have a comment or question that I can address, please feel free to reply to me and I will try to answer.

Second, I apologize in advance for the long-winded explanation this week, but it is important that everyone understand the rules when it comes to hitting a "Provisional" ball. There seems to be a lot of confusion as to when you can hit a provisional, when you must play the provisional and when you must abandon the provisional.

A lot of this confusion stems from the fact that we (CMR Men's Club) have adopted a local rule during our events that is contrary (in part) to the USGA rule. The purpose of our version of the rule is simply to speed up play.

In attempting to explain the rule (27-2), I will be discussing the USGA rule first. The CMR Men's Club version will be added in red so that you can differentiate the two. If you can become familiar with the USGA rule, ours is very easy to remember and implement. OK, here we go…

If your ball is lost (outside of a water hazard) or it goes out of bounds (OB), Rule 27-1 requires that you return to the spot from which your original ball was played, and under penalty of one stroke, put another ball in play. This is the "stroke and distance" option that we have discussed previously. However, since the spot of your original shot may be 200 yards back, it takes a lot of time to go back, hit another ball and return to your group.

To save time, Rule 27-2 allows you to play a Provisional Ball when you think the ball you just hit might be OB or lost outside of a water hazard. However, there are some requirements you must meet to use this Rule:

1. You must play the provisional before going forward to search for your original ball.

2. You must declare that it is a provisional to your opponent, or fellow-competitors before playing it. Be specific; say, "This is a provisional," not "I'd better hit another." Also, you should announce what kind of ball the original and the provisional are. For example, "My first ball was a Titleist 2 and my provisional is a Titleist 3".

3. You may NOT hit a provisional if the ONLY place the ball could be lost is in a water hazard or lateral water hazard (see previous rules discussion on your options when hitting into a water hazard).

If you violate any of the above requirements, the second ball you hit is not a "provisional". It becomes your ball in play and the original ball may not be played, even if you find it in bounds.

Now, for the sake of this discussion, let's assume that you have properly declared and hit a provisional ball. The provisional becomes your ball in play when any of the following occurs:

1. The original is determined to be OB;

2. You have searched for five minutes without finding the original ball;

3. You play the provisional from a place where the original is likely to be or somewhere nearer the hole than that.
Under the USGA rules, there is no “option” involved when playing a provisional. Either your provisional is in play, or it is abandoned. The provisional must be abandoned when either of the following occurs:

1. You find the original ball in-bounds inside five minutes;
2. You determine that the original is in a water hazard.

Rule 27-2 requires that if you find your original ball, you must abandon the provisional ball, even if you decide to deem your original ball unplayable. As you will recall from our previous discussion on unplayable lies, you have three options:

- Under penalty of one stroke, play a ball as nearly as possible to the spot from which the original ball was last played, no nearer to the hole. This is known as “stroke and distance”.

- Under penalty of one stroke, take a drop within two club lengths of where the ball is at rest, not nearer the hole. If you can’t find relief within two club lengths from where the ball is located, you need to choose a different option.

- Under penalty of one stroke, draw a line from the hole to where the ball is located and drop anywhere behind that point, keeping the point between you and the hole.

Rule 27-2 states that you cannot use the provisional ball even if you decide to proceed under the stroke and distance option of the unplayable ball Rule.

This is where our local CMR rule comes into play. Rather than having to head back to the tee (or wherever your previous shot was hit), we allow you to play the provisional, even if you find your first ball and deem it to be unplayable.

The most prevalent use of our local rule is on Hole 14 at CMR. If you hit your tee shot left on 14, there is a very good chance that it will be unplayable if you find it. Also, there is usually no where to drop the ball within two club lengths of where you find it, and it is not possible to find a playable lie by keeping the ball between you and the hole and going back on that line (as you would be going further up the hill into the junk).

Finally, there seems to be a lot of confusion about Provisionals and Water Hazards. Many golfers think they cannot hit a provisional if their original ball might be in a water hazard. However, that is not always the case. You are allowed to play a provisional ball in such circumstances as long as your original ball might instead be lost nearby, outside of the water hazard. When you get to the area, if you determine your original is in the hazard, you must abandon the provisional and use the water-hazard rule (Rule 26) that we have previously discussed.

Also, if you didn’t know an area was a water hazard, you would not be penalized for hitting the provisional. Once you determine that your ball is in the water hazard, you simply abandon the provisional and continue with the original or take relief under the water-hazard rule.

In order to help clear this up, I have included two of the decisions from the USGA on this issue:

27-2a/2 - Provisional Ball Played Solely in Belief Original Ball Might Be in Water Hazard

Question:

A player’s tee shot might be in a water hazard, but clearly it is not lost outside a water hazard or out of bounds. The player announces that, since his ball might be in the hazard, he is going to play a provisional
ball and he does so. Rule 27-2a seems to prohibit a provisional ball in the circumstances. What is the ruling?

Answer:

The player did not properly play a provisional ball which, according to the Definition of "Provisional Ball," is a ball played under Rule 27-2 for a ball which may be lost outside a water hazard or may be out of bounds. The second ball from the tee was in play since it was not a provisional ball.

27-2a/2.2 - Possibility That Original Ball Is in Water Hazard May Not Preclude Play of Provisional Ball

Question:

If a player's original ball may have come to rest in a water hazard, is he precluded from playing a provisional ball?

Answer:

No. Even though the original ball may be in a water hazard, the player is entitled to play a provisional ball if the original ball might also be lost outside the water hazard or out of bounds. In such a case, if the original ball is found in the water hazard, the provisional ball must be abandoned — Rule 27-2c (Formerly 27-2c/1)

The point made in the answer to this second Decision is important. Whether a ball may be lost inside or outside of a hazard may depend a lot on the surrounding terrain. If a wide fairway leads straight down to a water hazard, then the ball will either be found on the fairway or in the water hazard. Therefore, there is no need to hit a Provisional. If you do, your second ball is in play and you are laying three (3) regardless of where your first ball is found.

However, if there is long grass and/or trees around the water hazard then the ball could be lost anywhere inside or outside of the hazard because it could be hidden in the deep rough or could have been deflected off trees in any direction. In this case, you would be allowed to hit a provisional.

There was a high profile incident concerning this Rule back in 2004 during the Honda Classic when Greg Norman told his fellow competitors, Fred Couples and Charles Howell III, that he was going to play a provisional tee shot for his original ball that he thought might be lost in a water hazard. As explained above the Rules only permit a provisional to be played if the original ball is believed to be lost or out of bounds, not when it is in a water hazard.

Ironically, Norman found his original ball in a bunker. He then picked-up the ball that he thought was a provisional from the middle of the fairway and played from the bunker.

The Rules Official accompanying the group, Slugger White, told Norman that he would have to return and drop a ball where his second tee shot had come to rest (laying 3). Including the penalties for playing a wrong ball from the bunker (2 strokes) and lifting a ball that was in play (1 stroke), he would have been playing his seventh shot to the green. "He chose not to do that," White said. "He said, "I'm disqualified,' and left." Surprisingly, Fred Couples said that he also was not aware of this Rule.

Remember that the only two circumstances when you can hit a provisional ball are also the only two times when you are **required** to proceed under stroke and distance if you cannot find your original ball. Makes sense doesn’t it?
As always, please let me know if you have any questions on this topic, or would like a particular rule to be discussed in the coming weeks.

For those of you playing in the Tournament tomorrow, please remember that we are playing at Twin Oaks again.

- Chris

**Swing Thought for Tomorrow:**

“It is often necessary to hit a second drive to really appreciate the first one.”