

## What is the Applicable Rule?

The fundamental concept underpinning the game of golf is that of playing the ball as it lies, encoded in Rule 13-1, "The ball must be played as it lies, except as otherwise provided in the *Rules*." The concluding phrase of the Rule recognizes that this is not always practicable for a variety of reasons, thus, in many situations arising during play, a player may choose an option(s) under other Rules, rather than playing the ball as it lies. Among these options may be playing a substituted ball instead of the original ball. In all these latter situations, the player is at risk for not following the Rules properly and, if he does not, the Committee must assign a Rule to judge his actions.

Decision 34-3/6 is very helpful with several examples of Committee decisions in assigning a Rule to the player's actions in proceeding incorrectly. One of these examples is Decision 25-1c/2, which includes the words, "the player did not know the location of his original ball" and assigned Rule 27-1 as the only Rule that the player could have proceeded under. Another Decision not included in the examples given is Decision 18-2/8.5, which supports the same concept, but neither of these Decisions gives clear guidance or criteria for determining whether the player could be considered to know the location of the original ball precluding the application of Rule 27-1.

What follows is a discussion of development of criterion for determining whether the player knows the location of his original ball as applied to various situations subsequent to that knowledge where he substitutes a ball. It does not apply to the subset of cases where a player institutes search for a ball struck into a difficult position, subsequently properly identifies the original ball, and then makes a substitution.

The spectrum of all possible criteria for establishing that the player knows the location of the original ball includes: [1] having direct sight of the original ball when it came to rest, [2] being informed of exactly where it is or [3] having a reasonable understanding of where the ball is located. Only the first two criteria would be adequate to fulfil the requirement that the player "knows the location of the original ball." Consider the following case, which will illustrate why criterion [3] would not be sufficient:

In stroke play, A, B, and C play their shots from the fairway to an elevated green thought to be 150 yards away. They don't see their balls come to rest but are reasonably certain that they are on the green, A to the left, B in the center and C to the right.

When they arrive at the green, there are three balls on the green, one to the left [which A thinks is his], one in the center [which B thinks is his] and one to the

right [which C thinks is his]. Without lifting the ball, A makes a stroke at the ball to the left which is holed. B lifts the ball in the center, cleans it, replaces it and plays it into the hole. C lifts the ball to the right, inadvertently substitutes another ball from his pocket, places it on the spot where the other ball lay and plays it into the hole.

At that moment, the superintendent arrives and tells the players that all three of the balls they struck from the fairway are in the back bunker and that the three balls they found on the green are from the practice tee. He apologizes for the fact that the 150 yard marker is inaccurate and is probably about 100 yards from the center of the green, which explains why their balls are in the back bunker.

Here is the proper ruling.

A played a wrong ball and must correct his error by playing the proper ball in the back bunker. He incurred a penalty of two strokes and the strokes at the wrong ball do not count in his score. A did not play a substituted ball.

Both B and C have substituted a ball [B, the practice ball and C, the ball from his pocket] for his original ball by putting the substituted balls into play. Since the location of each of the original balls was not known at the time the substitutions were made, they were required to proceed under Rule 27-1. As the substituted balls were not put into play at the spots required by Rule 27-1, they each played from a wrong place. They each incurred a penalty of one stroke under Rule 27-1 and an additional penalty of two strokes under Rule 20-7c for playing from a wrong place. In this case, each of the breaches of playing from a wrong place was a serious one and both B and C are subject to disqualification unless they correct their errors as provided in Rule 20-7c. Of interest is the fact that there is no penalty for the substitutions as Rule 27-1 permits substitution. Neither B nor C played a wrong ball. It is irrelevant that the ball B substituted for his original ball was a practice ball or that the ball C substituted for his original ball was actually a ball owned by him. It was their intent to put the substituted balls into play even though they did not know that they were making a substitution. Had they discovered their mistakes before making a stroke at the substituted balls, they could have corrected their errors under Rule 20-6 by playing the original balls in the back bunker.

In this case, each of the players had a reasonable understanding of where his original was located but clearly that expectation would be insufficient for the Committee to decide that they knew the locations as they did not see the original balls come to rest on the putting green.

The discussion will now turn to several aspects of using the criterion to assist the Committee in assigning an appropriate Rule to a player's actions in playing a substituted ball instead of the original ball.

In general, there are two categories of candidates for an appropriate Rule when playing a substituted ball: [1] in the case of the location of the original ball not known, it would be Rule 27-1, or in specific instances, one of the other Rules covering a ball not found such as Rules 18-1, 24-3, 25-1c or 26-1, as suitable and [2] in the case of location of the original ball known, it would be Rule 13-1 or any of the exceptions inferred in Rule 13-1.

These two groups are mutually exclusive sets of candidates with respect to the location of the original ball.

There are specific cases where the location of the original ball was known according to the criterion and the player proceeds by substituting and playing a ball from another spot without lifting the original ball. In these instances, a question might arise if in fact the player did know the location of the original ball since he did not play the ball as it lay with the result that the Committee should assign Rule 27-1 to his actions. That is, having established that the player knew the location of the original ball immediately after its play, can a subsequent action by the player, such as substitution of another ball and play of that ball at a spot different from where the original ball came to rest, provide the basis for the Committee to revoke the positive determination of the location of the original ball and now conclude that the location of the original ball is not known with the result that the Committee assigns Rule 27-1 to the player's substitution? This question can be partially assuaged by examining the intent of the player in his actions in these instances and the available Rules that might logically apply.

Here are two examples of situations where the player's intent is an important element in assigning an applicable Rule after the knowledge of the location of the original ball question has been resolved.

- In Decision 18-2/8.5, the player, unaware that his ball was in ground under repair, played his ball as it lay. The player then learned that his ball had been in ground under repair and simply abandoned the original ball by dropping and playing a substituted ball according to ground under repair procedures, an action not permitted by the Rules. In the case where the player clearly knew the location of the original ball at the time he abandoned it, the Committee assigned Rule 13-1 not Rule 27-1. In the case where the player clearly did not know the location of the original ball at the time he abandoned it, the Committee assigned Rule 27-1.

- In the stroke play part of Decision 15-1/2.5, after B's ball came to rest on the putting green, A played to the putting green where his ball struck and moved B's ball. Although not specifically stated in the Decision, it must be assumed based on the actions of B that he saw his ball land on the putting green and knew the location where it came to rest thus satisfying the criterion at the time of play of the original ball. Correctly, B intended to proceed under Rules 18-5 and 20-3c but incorrectly lifted A's ball by mistake, placed it as near as possible to where B's ball lay before it was moved and holed out with it. His placement of the ball on the spot where his original ball lay confirmed the fact that he knew the location of his original ball before it was moved. The ruling was that B incorrectly substituted a ball in attempting to replace his moved ball [Rules 15-2 and 18-5]. An argument could be made in this case that, since he was mistaken in not lifting and placing the original ball into play, we should conclude that he did not know the location of the original ball at that later instant and assign Rule 27-1 to his actions. This conclusion is inappropriate because it is a settled matter that the player did know the location of the original ball when it came to rest. His subsequent actions can have no bearing on that fact. The Committee's assignment of Rule 18-5, not Rule 27-1, to his actions was appropriate.

There is a variation of the circumstances in Decision 15-1/2.5 that deserves mention. In the Decision, by mistake A played B's ball without lifting it, which is play of wrong ball. Suppose that A had lifted B's ball, replaced it and made a stroke at it. The applicable Rule to A's actions would be Rule 16-1b not Rule 27-1, as A had direct sight of his original ball as it came to rest and knew that it had come to rest on the putting green. The fact that he mistakenly lifted B's ball, replaced it and subsequently played it does not cancel the fact that he initially knew the location of his original ball, thus precluding the assignment of Rule 27-1 to his actions.

There are many other situations where it is important for the Committee to correctly assign an applicable Rule and where Rule 27-1 would not apply. If two players play their balls to the fringe of the putting green in clear view from where they played, they would be considered to know the location of their original balls. If subsequently one player were to mistakenly lift the other player's ball thinking that the lifted ball was his and that it assisted the play of the other player, and further that he replaced that ball and played it, the applicable Rule should be Rule 13-1 not Rule 27-1. His incorrect procedure does not cancel the fact that he knew the location of his original ball when it came to rest. However, in a similar situation, if a player plays his ball into an area with several balls [say a practice green] where it comes to rest in clear view but some distance away, and then lifts and plays a ball other than his original ball, the applicable

Rule would be Rule 27-1. The reasoning would be that he did not have sufficient clear and unmistakable visibility to unambiguously satisfy the criterion.

In summary, use of a proper criterion in the determination of whether the player knows the location of the original ball is an essential part of the process of the Committee in assigning an appropriate Rule to the actions of the player who subsequently substitutes a ball to continue play of a hole. However, it is the intent of the player in how he proceeds that is also crucial to the Committee's ruling and this intent can be evaluated as incorrect or correct:

- In the situation of Decision 18-2/8.5, the player incorrectly intended to follow the inapplicable Rule 25-1 and abandon the original ball. The Committee was able to assign as an applicable Rule, either Rule 13-1 [he knew the location of the original ball] or Rule 27-1 [he didn't know the location of the original ball] to his substitution.
- In the situation of Decision 15-1/2.5, the player correctly intended to follow the applicable Rule 18-5. The fact that he ultimately did not play the original ball does not change the fact that he knew the location of the original ball at the time it came to rest on the putting green. It would be incorrect for the Committee to apply Rule 27-1 to his mistaken substitution in his correct attempt to play under Rule 18-5, which did in fact apply to the original ball.

All cases of the player initially knowing the location of the original ball and subsequently playing a substituted ball instead of the original ball as it lay should be resolved with applying the Rule appropriate to the original ball as it lay, not Rule 27-1.