

Rule Tip of the Week

Mickelson Measuring

During the third round of the 2013 Wells Fargo Championship at Quail Hollow in Charlotte, North Carolina, Phil Mickelson didn't quite measure up on the par-5 15th hole. Having pulled his drive, Phil attempted to reach the green with his 3-wood playing from a sidehill lie close to a cart path (see adjacent photograph). What happened next is a great example of how various Rules often interact and apply to a particular situation.



After hooking his 3-wood shot, Phil was uncertain whether his ball was out of bounds. Thus, he elected to proceed under Rule 27-2 [Provisional Ball] which states, in part, “If a ball may be ... out of bounds, to save time the player may play another ball provisionally in accordance with Rule 27-1.” Rule 27-1 [Stroke and Distance; Ball Out of Bounds...] requires that the player play a ball as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was last played, and references Rule 20-5 [Making Next Stroke from Where Previous Stroke Made].

In accordance with Rule 20-5, Phil dropped a ball as near as possible to the spot from which he last played. By dropping a ball close to, but behind, his previous divot, he complied with Rule 20-2(b) [Dropping and Re-Dropping/Where to Drop]. Once the ball struck the ground, it rolled a couple of yards further from the hole and ended up very close to the cart path.

At that point, Phil did not particularly like the lie of his provisional ball so close to the cart path, so he measured with his 3-wood to see if his ball came to rest more than two club-lengths away from the point where he dropped the ball. Phil knew that Rule 20-2c(vi) [Dropping and Re-Dropping/When to Re-Drop] states, “A dropped ball must be re-dropped, without penalty, if it ... rolls and comes to rest more than two club-lengths from where it first struck a part of the course;” However, Phil determined that the provisional ball did not come to rest more than two 3-wood lengths after it was dropped.

At some point, Phil learned that his original ball was out of bounds so he was required to proceed with the provisional ball as per Rule 27-2(b) [When Provisional Ball Becomes Ball in Play]. Also, a PGA Rules Official arrived on the scene to verify that Phil was proceeding correctly with the provisional ball. Phil reenacted how he had used his 3-wood to measure the two club-length distance per Rule 20-2c(vi) [see adjacent photograph], but Phil queried whether he could use his putter instead to measure the two club-length distance.



Phil was hoping that he could re-measure the two club-lengths with his putter so that he would be allowed to re-drop his ball and thus avoid the dodgy lie adjacent to the cart path. Phil was also hoping that he might even be able to place his ball after the re-drop per Rule 20-2c which states, “If the ball when re-dropped rolls [more than two club-lengths from where it first struck a part of the course], it must be placed as near as possible to the spot where it first struck a part of the course when re-dropped.”

The Rules Official informed Phil that he could not measure with his putter since he had already measured with his 3-wood. The basis for this ruling is found in Decision 20-1 [Club to Be Used in Measuring] which states “The player must continue to use the club he originally used for measuring for all measuring in a given situation.” However, the Rules Official also determined that the cart path interfered with the lie and/or area of intended swing of the provisional ball, so Phil was ultimately permitted to drop away from the cart path pursuant to Rule 24-2 [Immovable Obstruction].