

Rule Tip of the Week

User-Friendly

1 + 2 = 2

$1 + 2 = 2$ is a mathematical equation you won't find being taught in any elementary school. However, you will find it hidden within the Rules of Golf. In certain situations, the USGA essentially says, "*One penalty stroke plus two penalty strokes equals two penalty strokes.*"

Mathematically, this doesn't make sense. However, in a user-friendly sort of way, the USGA has determined that a total penalty of three strokes is sometimes too severe for the Rules infraction committed by the player. Let's see how the USGA's unusual arithmetic works:



First, consider Rule 20-7c [Playing from Wrong Place – Stroke Play] which states, "*If a competitor makes a stroke from a wrong place, he incurs a penalty of two strokes under the applicable Rule.*" Now, couple that with Rule 18-2a [Ball at Rest Moved by Player, Partner, Caddie or Equipment] that, in many situations, penalizes a player one stroke for moving his ball in play when he is not permitted to do so.

Based on the foregoing, you would expect to be penalized three strokes if you moved your ball in play without authority (one penalty stroke under Rule 18-2a) and then played the ball from its new location, i.e., the wrong place (two penalty strokes under Rule 18-2 via Rule 20-7c). But that is not the case due to the "funny math" hidden in the penalty statement for Rule 18, which reads in part, "*If a player who is required to replace a ball fails to do so . . . , he incurs the general penalty for breach of Rule 18, but there is no additional penalty under this Rule.*"

Decision 18-2a/3 [Ball Lifted and Dropped Away from Boundary Stake Under Obstruction Rule] involves a player taking a drop away from an out of bounds stake, mistakenly thinking that the stake was an immovable obstruction. This Decision advises, "*The player incurs a penalty of one stroke under Rule 18-2a and he must replace his ball before playing his next stroke. Otherwise, he loses the hole in match play or he incurs a total penalty of two strokes in stroke play – see penalty statement under Rule 18.*"

Similarly, Decision 18-2a/7 [Ball Moved by Wind Replaced] describes the situation where wind moves a player's ball in play. Since wind is not an outside agency, the player should play the ball where it came to rest. By picking up the ball and returning it to its original location, the player is subject to a one stroke penalty under Rule 18-2a. To avoid a further penalty, the player should replace the ball on the spot where it came to rest after being moved by the wind. If he did not do so, "*he incurred a total penalty of two strokes – see penalty statement under Rule 18.*"