

The Golf Rules Review

An Intermittent Communique by the WWGA Golf Rules Maven

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Oops, You're Playing the Wrong Ball, Or Maybe just the Wrong Place

It happens! You get to the green, mark your ball, pick it up, only to see that it is not your ball. You have played someone else's ball or an abandoned ball in the vicinity where you thought your ball was. This is the most obvious scenario for playing the wrong ball. Or you are told you played your ball from the wrong place, for example outside the teeing area. Wrong ball or wrong place is the subject of this issue of The Golf Rules Review.

Playing the Wrong Ball

You are playing the **wrong ball** and thus using a ball that is not in play when:

1. You hit from the wrong hole.
2. You notice the ball you are playing is not the ball you tee'd off with and you did not substitute your ball while playing the hole.
3. You played your ball from out of bounds.
4. You find your "lost ball" after searching for more than 3 minutes and decide to play it from where you found it. Whether you find it or not, you cannot play your ball if you did not find it within 3 minutes of starting your search. See issue VIII for more information on Lost Balls and Provisional Balls.
5. You decide to play your provisional ball, even though your ball is in bounds or you found your ball within 3 minutes. At that point, your provisional ball is no longer in play, so you cannot play with it.
6. You let someone mark your ball on the putting green, and they put your ball a few feet to the side. When it is your turn to putt, you mistakenly putt from where the ball was without lifting it. Your ball was not in play when it was put to the side, so you are playing the wrong ball. If you had lifted the ball and then put it down, you would just be playing from the wrong place.

Penalty for playing the wrong ball

When you play a wrong ball, you are using a ball not in play. This means any score with that ball does not count.

1. In Stroke Play
 - If you hole out with the wrong ball and start the next hole, the penalty is disqualification because you never finished the last hole with your ball. Once you have started the next hole, you can't go back to the previous hole to correct your error.
 - If you discover your error before starting the next hole, go back to where your ball was before you made the error. Play the hole from there and add 2 strokes to your score. Any strokes played with the wrong ball do not count.
2. In Maximum Stroke Play, no penalty, but you must take the maximum score of double par for the hole plus 2 (e.g., 8 on Par 3s, 10 on Par 4s and 12 on Par 5s).

How A Wrong Ball becomes Right

Fiona's ball goes out of bounds. She finds the ball, picks it up and using the E-5 local relief rule, drops it on the fairway and hits it to the green. When she gets to the green and marks her ball, she sees the ball isn't hers. In fact, the OB ball was an abandon ball. What should she do?

The good news for Fiona is when she picked up the wrong ball and took the E-5 relief, it signified her intention to put that ball in play. The bad news is she played from the wrong place, because her ball was not used as the reference for her drop. As long as she did not gain a significant advantage from where she dropped, she can continue playing with that ball and hole out. She would, however, receive a 2-stroke penalty for playing from the wrong place, in addition to the 2 strokes for using the local E-5 drop rule.

If there is some question as to whether Fiona is gaining a significant advantage from where she dropped, she should go back and play a second ball based on the proximity of the original OB ball. It would then be up to the Tournament Committee to give a ruling.

3. In Match Play, the penalty is loss of hole. If both of you hit each other's ball accidentally, for example, you were both in the same bunker, the person who hit the wrong ball first, loses the hole. The error by the second player to hit is irrelevant because the first player already lost the hole.

Playing from the Wrong Place

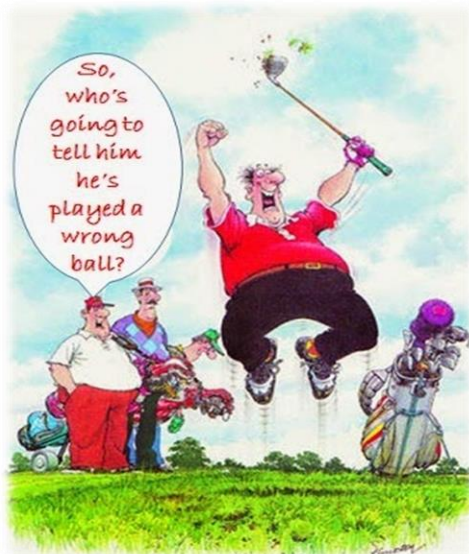
You are playing from the **wrong place** when the **ball is in play** but was dropped in the wrong place. Here are examples of playing from the wrong place:

1. Playing from outside the teeing ground for your hole. This could be playing in front of the tee markers or playing from the wrong set of tees. No penalty in Match Play, but your Opponent may make you do it over within the teeing ground.
2. Playing the wrong hole. If you stop before going on to the next hole, and then go play the correct hole, the penalty is just 2 strokes.
3. Taking relief in yellow stake penalty area on the wrong side i.e., side closest to the pin instead of hitting over the penalty area again. For example, using the drop area on Mt. View 3 or 9 when it is not allowed during a tournament. In this case you will have a significant advantage and could be subject to disqualification. You must correct your wrong place situation and re-hit from the tee box side of the hole.
4. You putt from the wrong place. You move your marker out of the way for someone and forgot to put it back before you putt.
5. Playing a ball that rolled outside your relief drop area when taking relief.
6. Your ball comes to rest in an area where play is not allowed (e.g., flower beds or ground under repair or a sensitive environment area where local rules state you cannot play) and you play anyways whether you are aware of it or not.

Penalty for playing from the wrong place

In Stroke Play and Maximum Score Stroke Play it is a 2-stroke penalty provided the player did not gain a significant advantage. If you did have a significant advantage, you must re-play your shot from the correct spot before starting the next hole or you will be disqualified.

In Match Play, the penalty is loss of the hole.



Match Play

The remedy for playing the wrong ball in Match Play is simple. The first player to play the wrong ball loses the hole and the match moves on to the next hole. But what if the players get to the next tee and discover they have each other's ball. The remedy is still simple, the results of the previous hole still stands. Why? Because it is uncertain when the balls were exchanged. It might have occurred when one player picked up both balls after a hole and just mixed them up.

Is the Player hitting from the wrong place if their estimated place to drop is wrong?

Players often have to estimate where the ball crossed the hazard line, or where it is lost or where a ball went OB, even the location of their knee. Such judgements need to be made promptly. The Revised 2019 Rules rely on the integrity of the Player's reasonable judgement for these estimates. This is true, even if later on, new information shows the estimate to be wrong.