

The Rules Applied (April 2022)

Today, we deal with the unhappy times when one must hit a provisional ball . . .

We're on 13 tee, and I hit my ball left toward the hillside, and my buddy hits right toward the barranca – both shots are probably gone. So we both should hit provisional shots, right?

Uh, no. A player may only play a provisional ball if he believes his original ball might be out of bounds or lost outside a penalty area (rule 18.3). The ball hit toward the hillside might be lost, and therefore you may play a provisional; but your buddy may not, because his ball was headed toward a penalty area (the barranca).

If a player decides to play a provisional ball, he must declare this before the provisional stroke is made, and he must identify both the original and provisional balls so that his playing companions will be able to determine which is which. It is not sufficient to say, "I'm hitting another". If the player does not make clear that he is hitting a provisional, then the second ball is a ball in play – it is not a provisional – regardless of whether the original ball is found.

OK, so I pop up my provisional, way short of where my original ball probably went. Now what?

As long as your provisional ball is farther away from the hole than your original ball, you may continue to play it as a provisional. Again, you must declare it as a provisional before hitting it, or else it is a ball in play.

OK, I did all that, and after I hit my second shot with my provisional ball, I find my original ball farther down the fairway (closer to the hole).

Lucky you. Your provisional ball is now out of play. Instead of lying 4 (original tee shot, penalty, provisional shot, second shot with provisional ball), your original ball is in play, and you are lying 1.

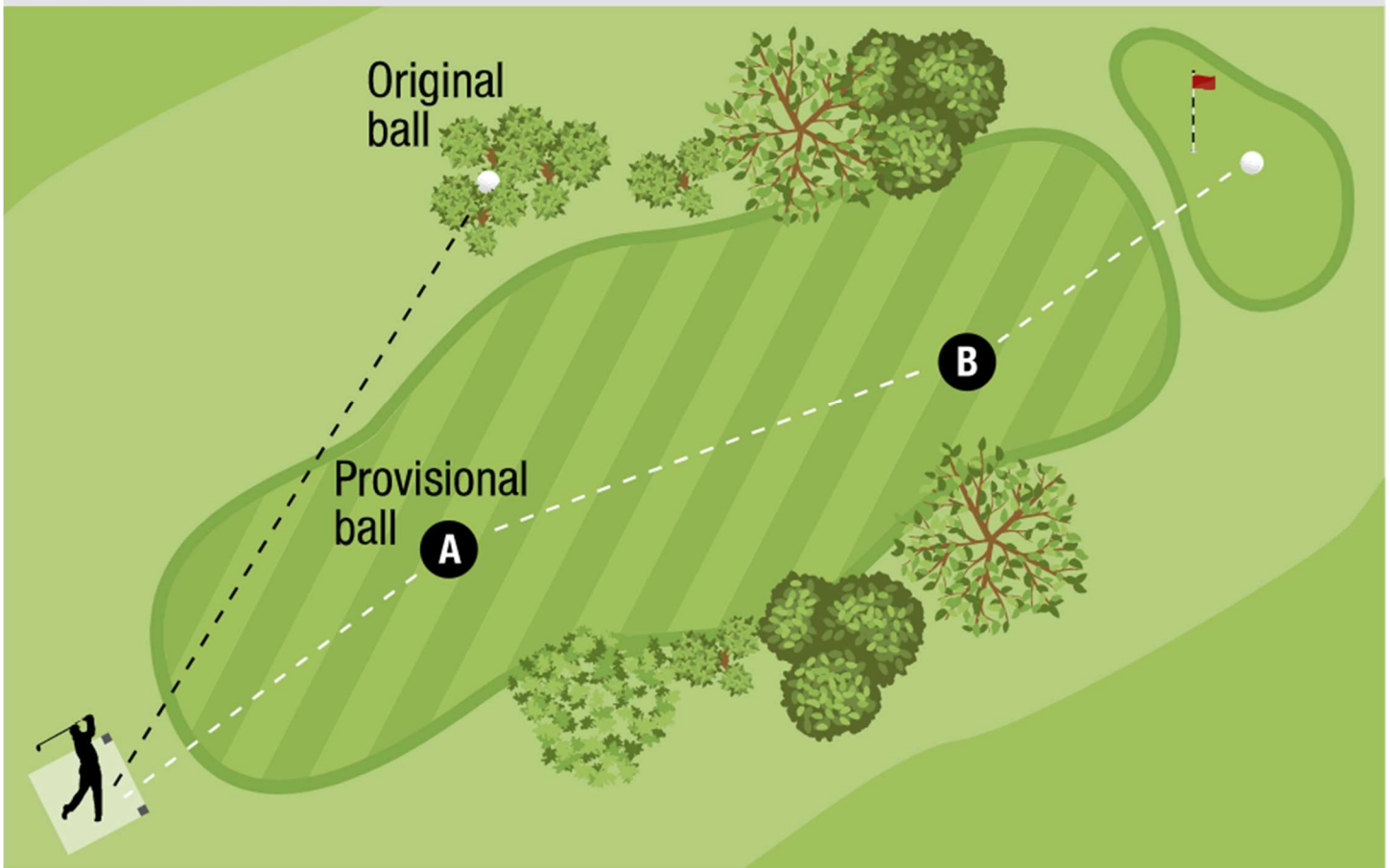
But what if my provisional off the tee was a career shot, rolling down to the 150 mark and giving me a shot at the green and a chance for par. Can I just use it and forget the original ball?

Sorry, no. If a player declares that his second ball is a provisional, he is required to make a reasonable search for his original ball. The player may ask others not to search (although they need not comply), and the search is subject to a 3 minute time limit. However, he must make a reasonable effort to find and identify his ball, even if he would prefer not to find it.

But what if I find my original ball in an unplayable lie? Can I take a penalty and use my provisional?

No. Once you find your original ball, the provisional is dead, and you will need to look at your options for an unplayable lie as if no provisional had ever been hit.

DIAGRAM 18.3c: PROVISIONAL BALL PLAYED FROM SPOT NEARER HOLE THAN WHERE ORIGINAL BALL IS ESTIMATED TO BE



A player's original ball played from the teeing area may be lost in a bush, so the player announces and plays a provisional ball, and it comes to rest at point A. As point A is farther from the hole than where the original ball is estimated to be, the player may play the provisional ball from point A without it losing its status as a provisional ball. The player plays the provisional ball from point A to point B. As point B is nearer the hole than where the original ball is estimated to be, if the player plays the provisional ball from point B, the provisional ball becomes the ball in play under penalty of stroke and distance.