

The Rules Applied - August 2022

Today's discussion relates to a subject so big, we can't address it all in one month. So we'll call this, "It Moved – part 1".

So there I am, on hole 15, on the green in regulation with a legit shot at birdie, and maybe even win a skin. But while I'm lining up my putt, the ball moves. I don't really know if it was my tapping down the ground around the ball or the wind. OK, it really wasn't that windy. So are you going to tell me I have to take a penalty?

Relax. Not everything is a penalty. There is never a penalty when the wind causes a ball to move. But even more important, there is no penalty for accidentally moving your ball on the green. (Rule 13.1d.) This is one of the rule changes made in 2019. (This rule change applies only when your ball is on the green.) So whether the ball moves as a result of wind or gravity, or even because of an inadvertent practice stroke, there is no penalty.

Yea! Finally some good news. What do I do now? Put the ball back where it was before it moved?

Ah. That depends. If you did not mark your ball, and you did not cause it to move, then you play from the new spot.

But if the ball moves after you have marked and re-placed it, then you must move it back to its original spot. If you're at the crest of the hill on 15 green, you will probably want to mark your ball, so that you can maintain your spot even if a gust of wind sends the ball backwards, off the front of the green.

Even if it has not been marked, your ball must be returned to its original spot if you accidentally caused it to move (even though there is no penalty).

And as you probably know, if the ball moves due to an outside agency – like being struck by another player's golf ball – your ball must also be moved back to its original spot.

And one more situation – if the ball comes to rest at the edge of the hole, you can only wait the time necessary to walk to the ball plus 10 seconds, to see if it falls in. After that time expires, if the ball falls into the hole, it must be re-placed in its original spot (at the edge of the hole), and you will need to take another stroke to tap it in.

So what if I accidentally forget to mark my ball and I pick it up?

That's not an accident. That's just a mental breakdown. Sorry, 1-stroke penalty for picking up the ball without properly marking it. (Rule 14.1a)