

PROVISIONAL BALL

When Provisional Ball Is Allowed

If a ball might be lost outside a penalty area or be out of bounds, to save time the player may play another ball provisionally under penalty of stroke and distance (see [Rule 14.6](#)). Before the stroke is made, the player must **announce** that he or she is going to play a provisional ball:

- It is not enough for the player only to say that he or she is playing another ball or is playing again.
- The player must use the word “provisional” or otherwise clearly indicate that he or she is playing the ball provisionally under [Rule 18.3](#).

If the player does not announce this (even if he or she intended to play a provisional ball) and plays a ball from where the previous stroke was made, that ball is the player’s ball in play under penalty of stroke and distance (see [Rule 18.1](#)).

When a player plays multiple balls from the same spot, each ball relates only to the previous ball played.

For Example: A player plays a provisional ball believing that his or her tee shot might be lost or out of bounds. The provisional ball is struck in the same direction as the original ball and, without any announcement; he or she plays another ball from the tee. This ball comes to rest in the fairway.

If the original ball is not lost or out of bounds, the player must continue play with the original ball without penalty.

However, if the original ball is lost or out of bounds, the player must continue play with the third ball played from the tee since it was played without any announcement. Therefore, the third ball was a ball substituted for the provisional ball under penalty of stroke and distance ([Rule 18.1](#)), regardless of the provisional ball's location. The player has now taken 5 strokes (including penalty strokes) with the third ball played from the tee.

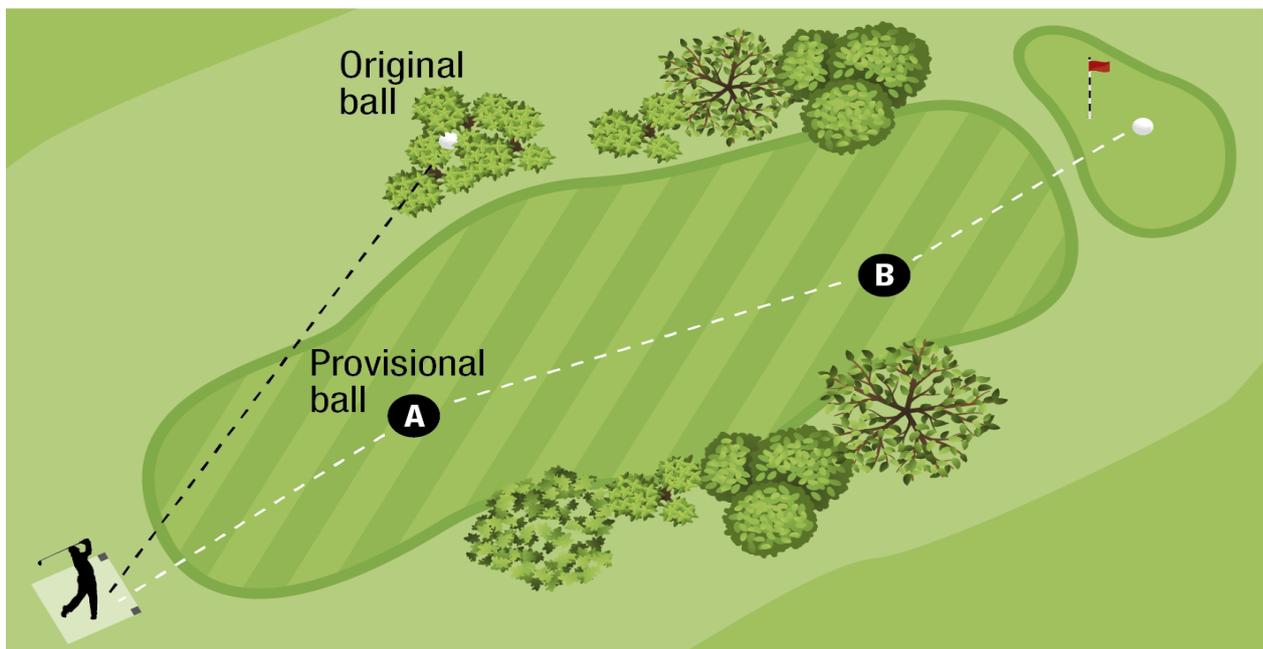


DIAGRAM 18.3c: PROVISIONAL BALL PLAYED FROM SPOT NEARER HOLE THAN WHERE ORIGINAL BALL IS ESTIMATED TO BE

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.

Opponent or Another Player May Search for Player's Ball Despite the Player's Request

Even if a player prefers to continue play of the hole with a provisional ball without searching for the original ball, the opponent or another player in stroke play may search for the player's original ball so long as it does not unreasonably delay play. If the player's original ball is found while it is still in play, the player must abandon the provisional ball ([Rule 18.3c\(3\)](#)).

For example, at a par-3 hole, a player's tee shot goes into dense woods, and he or she plays a provisional ball that comes to rest near the hole. Given this outcome, the player does not wish to find the original ball and walks directly towards the provisional ball to continue play with it. The player's opponent or another player in stroke play believes it would be beneficial to him or her if the original ball was found, so he or she begins searching for it.

If he or she finds the original ball before the player makes another stroke with the provisional ball the player must abandon the provisional ball and continue with the original ball. However, if the player makes another stroke with the provisional ball before the original ball is found, it becomes the ball in play because it was nearer the hole than the estimated spot of the original ball ([Rule 18.3c\(2\)](#)).

In match play, if the player's provisional ball is nearer the hole than the opponent's ball, the opponent may cancel the stroke and have the player play in the proper order ([Rule 6.4a](#)). However, cancelling the stroke would not change the status of the original ball, which is no longer in play.