

Rule Tip of the Week

Official Request

Webb Simpson coasted to victory at the 2018 Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass. Not only did he match the course record 63 with his second round, but he also set the 36-hole (15-under) and 54-hole (19-under) scoring records for the event. Standing on the 18th tee during his final round, Webb had a comfortable lead of six strokes. However, he almost made it interesting by carding a double-bogey on the final hole after putting his second shot into the lateral water hazard to the left of the 18th green.

From a Rules perspective, Webb did make it interesting by wisely requesting the assistance of PGA Tour Rules Official Stephen Cox to help him understand some ancillary issues associated with his decision to drop a ball within two club-lengths of the margin of the lateral water hazard per Rule 26-1c [Relief for Ball in Water Hazard], especially since the adjacent bunker was within two club-lengths of the hazard margin. In a question and answer format, here are a few of the issues that were relevant to Simpson's situation:



- a) *Would it have been permissible for Webb to drop a ball in the bunker when taking relief from the lateral water hazard?*

Yes, so long as he was dropping a ball within two club-lengths of, and not nearer the hole than, the point where his original ball last crossed the margin of the lateral water hazard. See Decision 26-1/2 [Player Proceeding Under Water Hazard Rule Drops Ball in Another Hazard].



- b) *Having dropped a ball on the strip of grass between the lateral water hazard and the bunker, what would be the ruling if the dropped ball rolled into and came to rest in the bunker?*
Webb would have been required to re-drop the ball per Rule 20-2c(i) [When to Re-Drop] which states, "A dropped ball must be re-dropped, without penalty, if it ... rolls into and comes to rest in a hazard;..." Note that Webb would not be allowed to change relief options, i.e., he would be required to re-drop within two club-lengths of where his original ball last crossed the margin of the water hazard. See Decision 20-2c/5 [Changing Relief Options When Re-Dropping Required]. Also, according to Rule 20-2c, if the ball was re-dropped on the grass, and it subsequently rolled into either the bunker or the lateral water hazard, then Webb would have been required to place the ball as near as possible to the spot where the ball first struck the course when re-dropped.
- c) *If Simpson had successfully dropped a ball on the grass and the ball rolled toward the bunker without reaching the bunker, what would have been the ruling if Webb had to stand in the bunker in order to play his next stroke?*
Absent any interference by an immovable obstruction or an abnormal ground condition, Webb would have been required to play the ball as it lay, or else deem his ball unplayable incurring an additional penalty stroke. See Decision 13-4/1 [Touching Sand in Bunker When Ball Lies Outside Bunker]. Also note that Webb would not have been allowed to build a stance within the bunker per Rule 13-3 [Building Stance].
- d) *Could Simpson's caddie stop a ball dropped on the strip of grass if the ball was heading toward the water hazard in order to keep from losing the ball in the water hazard?*
Per Decision 20-2c/4 [Caddie Stops Dropped Ball Before It Comes to Rest; When Penalty Occurred], there would have been no penalty if Webb's caddie stopped the ball after it had entered the hazard and was about to roll over the edge of the bulkhead, i.e., at a position from which Webb would have been required to re-drop it under Rule 20-2c. However, if Webb's caddie had acted prematurely and stopped the dropped ball when it was still on the grass and not yet in the hazard, then Simpson would have incurred a penalty of two strokes in stroke play under Rule 1-2 [Exerting Influence on Movement of Ball or Altering Physical Conditions].