

Rule Tinseltown

Rahmifications

During the third round of the PGA Championship at the Bellerive Country Club in St. Louis, Missouri, on the 8th hole, Jon Rahm pulled his drive into the left rough. As he walked through the rough in search of his ball, he felt his shoe touch his ball. At that point, he summoned a Rules Official for assistance.



Rahm told the Rules Official that the top of his shoe contacted the ball, but he did not believe he had moved his ball. Nevertheless, the Rules Official ruled that (a) Rahm had caused his ball to move; (b) Rahm needed to drop his ball, rather than replace it; and (c) Rahm could not clean his ball. Here are several “Rahmifications” or discussion points associated with these rulings:

Rahmification #1: How do you determine if a player has actually caused his ball?

Decision 34-3/9 [Resolution of Questions of Fact; Referee and Committee Responsibility] points out, “*Resolving questions of fact is among the most difficult actions required of a referee, or the Committee as a whole. For example, these situations include a broad array of incidents such as determining whether a player caused a ball to move*”

Relevant guidance is presented in Decision 18-2/0.5 [Weight of Evidence Standard for Determining Whether Player Caused His Ball to Move]. According to this Decision, “*When a player’s ball at rest moves, the cause of a ball’s movement has to be assessed. In many situations, the answer will be obvious In other situations, however, there may be some question as to why the ball moved.... All relevant information must be considered and the weight of the evidence must be evaluated. ... If the weight of evidence indicates that it is more likely than not that the player caused the ball to move, even though that conclusion is not free from doubt, the player incurs a one-stroke penalty under Rule 18-2 and the ball must be replaced.*”

Given that Rahm was walking through the rough, the Rules Official’s assessment of the weight of the evidence found that that it was more likely than not that Rahm had caused his ball to move.

Rahmification #2: After a player has accidentally caused his ball to move, does he then replace or drop his ball?

According to Rule 18-2 [Ball at Rest Moved by Player, Partner, Caddie or Equipment], except as permitted by the Rules, if a player causes the ball to move, the ball must be replaced. However, if it is impossible to determine the spot where the ball is to be replaced, then Rule 20-3c [Placing and Replacing: Spot Not Determinable] applies, and (a) through the green or in a hazard, the ball must be dropped as near as possible to the place where it lay; (b) on the putting green, the ball must be placed as near as possible to place where it lay.

Given that it was impossible for Rahm to determine where his ball was located prior to his shoe contacting the ball, the Rules ruled that Rahm had to drop his ball, instead of replacing it.

Rahmification #3: When may a player clean his ball without penalty?

According to Rule 21 [Cleaning Ball], a ball on the putting green may be cleaned when it has been lifted under Rule 16-1b [The Putting Green: Lifting and Cleaning Ball]. Elsewhere, a ball may be cleaned when lifted, except when it has been lifted:

- To determine if it is unfit for play per Rule 5-3 [Ball Unfit for Play];
- For identification, in which case it may be cleaned only to the extent necessary for identification per Rule 12-2 [Lifting Ball for Identification]; or
- Because it is assisting or interfering with play per Rule 22 [Ball Assisting or Interfering with Play].

Per Rule 21, the Rules Official should have permitted Rahm to clean his ball before dropping it.

Rahmification #4: In stroke play, what recourse does a player have when a Rules Official renders an adverse ruling?

Per Decision 3-3/2 [Second Ball Played Despite Adverse Ruling], the answer depends upon whether or not the Committee has given authority to its referees to make final decisions. If the referee concerned has not been given authority to make final decisions, then the player is entitled to invoke Rule 3-3 [Doubt as to Procedure]. Even if the referee concerned has been given authority to make final decisions, he still has discretion to allow the player to proceed under Rule 3-3. However, if the referee renders a final decision, then there is no justification for the player to invoke Rule 3-3. Under such circumstances, if the player goes ahead and invokes Rule 3-3, he will be penalized two strokes for undue delay per Rule 6-7 [Undue Delay; Slow Play], and the score with the original ball, including the two-stroke penalty, must count.