

# Rule Tip of the Week Drop-Drop-Place...Plop!

Ricky Fowler was cruising to victory at the 2019 Waste Management Phoenix Open, otherwise known as “*the greatest show on grass*,” until he came to the par-4 11<sup>th</sup> hole at the TPC Scottsdale course. Leading by a comfortable 5 strokes at the time, Ricky’s third stroke from just short of the green did not check up, but trickled over the back of the green and rolled down the steep slope behind the green ending up in a red penalty area.

The adjacent photographs, courtesy of NBC Sports, partially illustrate the bizarre sequence of events that transpired when Ricky decided to take lateral relief from the red penalty area pursuant to Rule 17.1d(3) [Lateral Relief]. Under this Rule and Rule 14.3 [Dropping Ball in Relief Area], Ricky dropped a ball within two club-lengths of, and not nearer the hole than, the estimated point where the original ball last crossed the edge of the red penalty area.

When he first dropped a ball in the right way, i.e., straight down and from knee height, it rolled down the slope and into the water. Rule 14.3c(2) [What to Do if Ball Dropped in Right Way Comes to Rest Outside Relief Area] states, “*If the ball comes to rest outside the relief area, the player must drop a ball in the right way a second time.*” When Ricky dropped a ball a second time, that ball disappeared into the penalty area as well. At that point, and as shown in the adjacent photograph, Ricky was required per Rule 14.3c(2) to place a ball on the spot where the ball dropped the second time first touched the ground.



Once Ricky placed a ball at rest on the course, that ball was in play per Rule 14.4 [When Player’s Ball Is Back in Play after Original Ball Was Out of Play], and Ricky was lying 4 = 3 “talent” strokes + 1 penalty stroke for taking relief from the penalty area. After Ricky picked up the tees marking the relief area, he walked up to the green to assess how to play his next stroke over the bunker to a tight hole location. As he looked back at his ball (and as shown in the second photograph), Ricky watched in disbelief as his ball started to move and eventually rolled over the edge of the penalty area before plopping into the water. That “plop” occurred approximately 30 seconds after Ricky had placed the ball at rest in the relief area!



Since his ball in play was again lost in the penalty area, Ricky had to take relief a second time from the penalty area, thereby incurring a second penalty stroke. This time, with helpful supervision by PGA Rules Official, Slugger White, Ricky repeated the “drop – drop – place” procedure per Rule 14.3c(2) and was lying 5 before playing his next stroke onto the green. Fortunately for Ricky, after pitching onto the green, he drained the putt and escaped with a triple bogey 7 for the hole! While all of this was happening, Branden Grace was making a birdie on the 12<sup>th</sup> hole, so Ricky walked off the 11<sup>th</sup> green with only a one stroke lead.



If you were watching the live coverage, you might have wondered why Ricky chose not use the stroke-and-distance option when first taking relief from the red penalty area per Rule 17.1d(1). Perhaps he had forgotten about that option, or perhaps he was concerned that another attempt from the front of the green might once again end up in the water! Even more curious is why Ricky did not exercise the stroke-and-distance option after experiencing the “drop – drop – place...plop” fiasco. Fortunately, Ricky got away with using the lateral relief option a second time, but given the severity of the slope behind the green, he definitely risked seeing another ball disappearing into the water after repeating the “drop-drop-place” sequence!