

Rule Tip of the Week

Fowler's Faux Pas

During the second round of the 2019 WGC-Mexico Championship at the Club de Golf Chapultpec, Ricky Fowler made a few mistakes that led to a triple-bogey seven on the par-4 10th hole. In the first photograph, Ricky is about to play his approach shot to the 10th green from a spot only a foot or so into the right rough. His first mistake was shanking this shot out of bounds. As a result, he was required to proceed under penalty of stroke and distance. As noted in the new Rules, when a player's ball comes to rest out of bounds, the normal progression of playing from the teeing area to the hole is broken. Thus, the player must resume that progression by playing again from where the previous stroke was made.



As shown in the second photograph, Ricky's next mistake was to revert to the old Rules when proceeding under penalty of stroke and distance by dropping a ball from shoulder height as near as possible on the spot from which the original ball was last played. Humans are creatures of habit, as evidenced by Ricky's post-round statement: "*I know I didn't drop properly, but just going through the natural kind of progression of what you do with the drop, that's just what you're used to. I have done that for 30 years. Well, I guess not that long. I started playing at two, so 28 [years].*"

Unfortunately for Ricky, his caddy was looking away when he dropped the ball from shoulder height so his caddy did not see the wrong drop. Likewise, no one else playing in his group saw the mistake. Had Ricky realized it himself or had been made aware of the wrong drop by someone before he played his next stroke, he could have corrected the mistake per Rule 14.5 [Correcting Mistake Made in Substituting, Replacing, Dropping or Placing Ball] and avoided incurring another penalty.



The correct procedure for dropping a ball, as prescribed by Rule 14.3 [Dropping Ball in Relief Area], is for the player himself or herself to (a) drop the original ball or another ball (b) from knee height so that the ball falls straight down without the player throwing, spinning or rolling it or using any other motion that might affect where the ball will come to rest (c) so that the ball does not touch any part of the player's body or equipment before it hits the ground, and (d) with the ball dropped in the right way, it lands in, and comes to rest within, the prescribed relief area.

By dropping the old way from shoulder height, Ricky dropped in a wrong way. Per Rule 14.3b(3) [Ball Must Be Dropped in Relief Area], if a player makes a stroke at the ball from where it came to rest after being dropped in a wrong way, the player gets one penalty stroke if the ball was played from the relief area. However, if the ball was played from outside the relief area, the player gets the general penalty, i.e., loss of hole in match play and two strokes in stroke play. Ricky was fortunate that his ball, although dropped in a wrong way, came to rest in the required relief area so his mistake in dropping the ball from shoulder height only cost him one penalty stroke.

Not only did Ricky incur an unnecessary penalty stroke, but he also missed out on an opportunity to play from the fairway when proceeding under penalty of stroke and distance! Per Rule 14.6 [Making Next Stroke from Where Previous Stroke Made], the reference point for taking stroke-and-distance relief would have been the spot where the previous stroke was made in the rough, and the relief area within which he could then drop a ball would have been one club-length from, but not nearer the hole than, that reference point.

Under the new Rules, a "club-length" is the "*length of the longest club of the 14 (or fewer) clubs that the player has during the round ... other than a putter.*" Thus, under the new Rules, Ricky could have used his driver to measure the one club-length in the direction of the fairway from the spot in the rough where the previous stroke was made, and the relief area for stroke-and-distance relief would have extended into the fairway by approximately 2½ feet!