



There are different courses of action for a lost ball and a ball lost in a water hazard.

GETTY IMAGES

Gone astray

Dealing with a ball that's lost or out of bounds can be penal, but not complicated

There are no surveys or stats on the matter, but the one golf rule that likely is ignored or broken most often is Rule 27 (Ball lost or out of bounds; provisional ball).

We've all seen instances where a player has hit a ball that obviously is out of bounds and he casually remarks, "I'll just drop one up there, where it went out."

While that decision might save a couple of minutes, the player likely is on his way to being disqualified. Should the player elect to "drop one up there, where it went out," he is in violation of Rule 20 (Playing from wrong place), which (in stroke play) incurs a penalty of two strokes, but additionally, the mistake must be corrected before the player plays from the next tee. Rule 20-7c reads, in part: "The Committee must determine whether the competitor has committed a serious breach of the applicable Rule. . . . If the competitor has committed a serious breach and has failed to correct it . . . he is disqualified."

A note that follows Rule 20-7 explains, "A competitor is deemed to have committed a serious breach of the applicable Rule if . . . he has

gained a significant advantage as a result of playing from a wrong place."

Certainly it is reasonable to believe that a player who hits his driver 200 yards but out of bounds, then incorrectly plays from a location 200 yards closer to the hole than is permitted, has gained a "significant advantage." In this example, the term "significant advantage" cannot be defined strictly by distance; it is equally as easy for a player to gain a significant advantage by playing from a spot that is inches away from the correct location.

Actually, Rule 27 is quite simple because a player has only one choice in how to proceed. "If a ball is lost or out of bounds, the player must play a ball, under penalty of one stroke, as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was played."

The most critical element to remember when dealing with a ball that is lost or out of bounds is that, where Rule 27 is concerned, the ball *must not* be lost in a water hazard, an obstruction or an abnormal ground condition or moved by an outside agency. Otherwise, different Rules come into play. But, in the case of a player proceeding because his ball is in the water, there must be virtual

certainty to that end; otherwise, the player should proceed under Rule 27 and consider the ball to be lost.

As an example, a player hits a drive but does not see the ball land. When he gets to where he believes the ball is likely to be, there is a water hazard and a large area of tall, dense rough. Since the ball could reasonably be in the rough *or* the water, the player must treat the ball as lost unless it is identified in the hazard or there is some evidence it is there; perhaps someone closer than the player saw it splash in the water. But if the area was closely mown, absent of trees and the ball could not reasonably be anywhere except the hazard, the player may proceed under the applicable rule concerning water hazards.

When a player hits a ball that could be lost or OB, he should state his intention to play a provisional ball and play that ball before going forward to search for the original. Without penalty, a player may play his provisional up to the area where the original ball is likely to be, at which point a search for the original may begin.

That's definitely a time-saving procedure, and no one will complain about that. 🏌️