

## Accidentally Moving a Ball in Play



I am sure that it has happened to most of us, probably more than once. We are addressing our ball in play somewhere on the course and we accidentally touch it with our club, causing it to move, or not. How do we proceed?

If the ball does not move from its spot when we touch it with our club, it has not moved. Even if it rocks from its spot but returns to the same place it has not moved, according to the Definition of Moved; A ball is deemed to have “moved” if it leaves its position and comes to rest in any other place.

If the ball does not move there is no penalty, even if it is lying in a hazard when we accidentally touch it with our club, which is a point that is frequent misunderstood (Decision 13-4/12).

However, if a ball in play does move from its spot and comes to rest a dimple or more from where it was, then a penalty of one stroke is incurred and the ball has to be replaced, Rule 18-2a. Note that part of this Rule states;

*Except as permitted by the Rules, when a player’s ball is in play, if*

*(i) the player, his partner or either of their caddies:*

- *lifts or moves the ball,*
  - *touches it purposely (except with a club in the act of addressing the ball),*
- or*

• *causes the ball to move, or*

*(ii) the equipment of the player or his partner causes the ball to move, the player incurs a penalty of one stroke.*

The implication is that if a player **purposely** touches their ball with their club other than in the act of addressing their ball (why would they?) a penalty is incurred. Probably one of the most common breaches of this Rule is when a player purposely touches their ball in play with their fingers, usually in order to identify it. Of course, you may identify your ball before playing it from anywhere on the course, but you must follow the correct procedure to avoid a penalty. See **this earlier blog** for the correct procedure.

You may have noticed that the above relates to a ball in play. Before you make your first stroke on a hole from the teeing ground, the ball is not in play and so there is no penalty for accidentally causing it to move in this circumstance, e.g. with a practice swing. A ball may then be replaced

anywhere within the teeing ground to continue play.

If you are interested in seeing an example of a player accidentally moving their ball in play on the putting green, I recommend that you click on **this link** to view a European Tour video from 2013 of Danish Professional golfer, Thorbjørn Olesen, who unfortunately seemed to get the yips as he addressed his ball while trying to avoid taking his stance on his fellow competitor's the line of putt.