

## John Paramor's Memo on Provisional Balls



I want to begin this week's blog by emphasising that I have taken the information from an article in last Sunday's Scotsman newspaper, penned by the respected golf media reporter, John Huggan. I have not been able to verify the core detail, despite searching my usual sources.

However, I do know that John Huggan was present in Abu Dhabi for the HSBC Golf Championship and on a guest podcast, he claims to have spoken to about 40 of the competitors there, so I have absolutely no reason to doubt the veracity of his article content;

*Last week in Abu Dhabi, the European Tour's chief referee, John Paramor, distributed a memo to every player. The first two sentences of Paramor's missive read as follows: "In recent weeks, there have been a number of occasions where players have not played a provisional ball when their original ball has not been found. Some of those players when asked for the reason why they had not played a provisional ball stated they were unsure that they were entitled to do so."*

*This beggars belief. These players are the sporting equivalent of lollipop ladies who have neglected to read even the first page of the Green Cross Code. That's bad enough, but their lack of knowledge of Rule 27-2 surely adds – at a conservative estimate – as much as 20 minutes to tournament rounds.*

*And there's more. Further down the page, Paramor cites another example of the sort of things he and his overworked team have to deal with. During last year's BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth, an unnamed individual pushed his approach to the 15th green way right of the putting surface. Only after walking forward did he ascertain that the ball was out of bounds.*

*Having done so, Player X trudged all the way back to where he hit his original shot. He then hit his next ball right of the green into a similar area. Here's where it gets really bad though. Without either hitting a provisional ball, or walking forward as he had done previously, X simply stood and waited for news. That's waited. And waited. And waited. What a dope. Eventually, he was penalised two shots for "undue delay of play". All because he clearly had no idea what he was doing.*

So what's going on here?

*"The current generation of young players is the first who don't seem to have learned the game on the golf course," points out Ogilvy, who is 37 (Geoff Ogilvy, Australian Pro golfer). "These days, they seem to learn golf on the range, with the Trackman machines and their coaches beside them. But that's not golf, of course, it's just hitting.*

*"All I ever did growing up was play golf. And when you do that you learn the rules as you go. Every few days, a rule comes up. Things happen. But when all you do is hit balls on the range, you never learn rules. And there's too much of that in the modern game, certainly compared with what has gone before."*

*"I'm not saying guys shouldn't hit balls in an effort to improve," says Ogilvy. "But there is a knock-on effect when a guy spends more time on the range than on the course. It would be interesting if part of gaining a tour card were passing a basic rules test. Maybe the only thing I can say in defence of players is that the rules on tour often vary from those everyone else plays by. Then again, we're not really talking about such things here. It's not asking much for us to understand and deal with situations that come up during nearly every round.*

*"There are what might be called 'core' rules, those we all have to know if the game is to be played properly. Just a working knowledge of those is going to make you safe 99.9 per cent of the time. And if something really extraordinary does happen, by all means call for a referee. Bottom line: we just need to know a few of the rules." - John Huggan, Scotland on Sunday, 25th January, 2015.*

Some readers may remember that back in March 2010, I wrote a blog titled, 'Tour Players to Go 'Back to School' over Rules'. At that time, the European Tour had announced plans to educate players on simple rulings, so as to reduce the number of times that they delay play by waiting for a referee to make what usually turn out to be a straightforward ruling. **Click here** to read the blog. Unfortunately, when I queried the R&A, last June, on how many times they had imposed a sanction on a tour player following the introduction of this plan, they would not share any details. But their spokesperson did comment, "Until recently, this has acted as a deterrent and we have had few of these rulings requests, but we are quite willing to firstly remind the players that this policy is in force and that we are ready to enforce it where necessary."

Hmmmm. Perhaps the time has come to re-visit this plan and either enforce it, or come up with some other solution. One suggestion is that players who ask for a referee, when it is obvious as to how they should proceed under the Rules, should be penalised under Rule 6-7 if they cause in excess of a two minutes delay, by having to wait for an unnecessary ruling. My guess is that it would only take a few instances of penalties being imposed for delaying play by waiting for a ruling on a trivial Rules issue, before players would realise that it was in their financial interest to take time to learn the basics for

themselves. You may remember from another earlier blog of mine, George Peper estimated that by learning what he called the '10 Golden Rules of Golf', players would be able to resolve 90% of the Rules situations that are routinely encountered on the course (check **this link**).