

Properly playing a "Provisional" Ball

1. Know when you can play a provisional:

If you think your ball might be lost, you can put a backup ball (aka Provisional ball) into play.

2. Announce your intention:

The first thing you should do is say something like: "I'm gonna hit a provisional." Then go ahead and play the shot. Make sure your fellow-competitors hear you say this. That's important. Also, don't let your caddie or partner start searching for your original until after you hit the provisional.

3. Keep hitting your provisional ball until you reach the area where your original ball might be lost:

There's no limit to the number of strokes you can take with a provisional ball. If your original is found, disregard the strokes and any penalties you might've incurred with the provisional. Continue with your original.

4. You have five minutes to find the original:

The clock starts the minute you or your partner (or either of your caddies) begins to search. If you don't find it, the provisional is in play, and you incur the stroke-and-distance penalty for losing the original ball.

5. You must abandon your provisional ball if your original isn't lost or out-of-bounds, or you determine that it's in a water hazard:

Conversely, anytime you hit a great provisional shot, you might not want to find your original ball. If someone finds it before you play a shot with the provisional, the first ball is the one you must play.

6. If you're 99.9 percent sure your ball went into a water hazard, don't hit a provisional:

Once you re-hit from the same spot, that new ball is in play (with a stroke added to your score). You've forfeited the right to drop up by the hazard.

7. If you think your provisional might also be lost, hit another:

This process continues until you have a ball in play. Just keep track of which ball is which!

