

Accidental Movement of the Ball

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The “Accidental Movement of the Ball” on the putting green local rule is in effect this week at the Puresilk Bahamas LPGA Classic in Nassau, Bahamas. The professional tours, the USGA and the NCAA have adopted this for their competitions as of January 1, 2017. Most recreational leagues and clubs should follow suit and get it into effect at their facilities. It’s not in the Rules and must be publically adopted to be in effect.

The local rule reads as follows:

[Rules 18-2, 18-3 and 20-1 are modified as follows:](#)

[When a player’s ball lies on the putting green, there is no penalty if the ball or ball-marker is accidentally moved by the player, his partner, his opponent, or any of their caddies or equipment.](#)

The moved ball or ball-marker must be replaced as provided in Rules 18-2, 18-3 and 20-1.

This Local Rule applies only when the player's ball or ball-marker lies on the putting green and any movement is accidental.

Note: If it is determined that a player's ball on the putting green was moved as a result of wind, water or some other natural cause such as the effects of gravity, the ball must be played as it lies from its new location. A ball-marker moved in such circumstances is replaced."

We all saw the drama unfold at Oakmont with Dustin Johnson at the U.S. Open last year but I want to emphasize that this is not a knee jerk reaction to that series of events. The Rule had problems and was being looked at far before any of that happened and it became obvious in a very public way.

The local rule is a step in the right direction and it gets players off the hook especially if they call in an official. We know the player won't get a penalty, but the question will be - does the player put the ball back and play or do they play it from the new place? A player can still get a two stroke penalty for playing from the wrong place.

The basic tenet of golf is "if you move your ball, you need to put it back." So if a player ACCIDENTLY moves her ball on the green we are going to put it back. She kicks it, drops her ball or ball marker on it, it moves after she puts putter next to it or some other action near it – we put it back with no penalty.

The times when we play from the new position is when wind, water or gravity obviously moves it. Brittany Lincicome just had this precise thing happen on hole 17. She had set her club near the ball, lifted her club and her ball moved. On a calm day, on a fairly flat green we could argue that she had done enough "stuff" near her ball to have accidentally moved it. Under the local rule, we would have put it back with no penalty, but in this case it was obvious the really gusty winds made it move. She played it from it's new position with no penalty.

We had an incident out here yesterday where a player just plain goofed and picked up her ball without marking it. The new local rule doesn't apply here even though it seems like that might be accidental. There was INTENT to pick up that ball. The player got a one stroke penalty and replaced it. And also remember that all of this only applies on the putting green.

This is a good additional local rule at our disposal and it will be interesting to see how it is applied in different conditions this year.