

# Playing the wrong ball

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June 13, 2014

Unfortunately, Hunter Mahan's stroke at a wrong ball may have cost him a chance to play this weekend. I've gotten lots of questions on this so let's explain how Rule 15-3 works in stroke play.

If a competitor makes a stroke or strokes at a wrong ball, he incurs a penalty of two strokes. He has to correct his mistake before making a stroke on the next teeing ground or, in the case of the last hole of the round, fails to declare his intention to correct his mistake before leaving the putting green, he is disqualified. What that means is he had to go back and play from where his ball was located. Since both Hunter Mahan and Jamie Donaldson played each other's ball, they both had to do this.

Strokes made by a competitor with a wrong ball do not count in his score. So basically add two strokes and start back from where your ball originally lies. If the wrong ball belongs to another competitor, its owner must place a ball on the spot from which the wrong ball was first played. If they don't know the exact spot, then they drop and continue.

Mahan's caddie took full responsibility for the mix up because he walked up to Jamie's ball which was the same type of ball with similar markings but it is still the player's job to make sure he is hitting his own ball. Rule 6-5 tells us this and it also says you should put an identifying mark on your ball. Furthermore, Rule 12-2 lets a player identify his ball without penalty if he is unsure. The player must announce his intention to his fellow competitor and give him a chance to watch the process while he marks, lifts and identifies it. He can't clean it beyond what might be necessary to see his identifying mark.

We all get complacent and it could, and has, happened to most of us. It usually never happens again though because it is an unnecessary penalty we never forget. Too bad it might cost Hunter a chance to play all 72 holes in Pinehurst.