

Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

25. Time for Search Before Ball is Lost

Current Rule: If a player's ball is not found within 5 minutes after the player or his or her caddie began searching for it:

- The ball is treated as "lost", and
- The player gets a one-stroke penalty and must play another ball from the spot of the previous stroke (that is, must play under penalty of stroke and distance). (Definition of "Lost Ball"; Rule 27-1c.)

2019 Rule: Under Rule 18.2, the time for a ball search (before the ball becomes lost) will be reduced from 5 minutes to 3 minutes.

Reasons for Change:

- Limiting the search period to 3 minutes is more consistent with the underlying principle that golf is to be played in a prompt and continuous way, without long pauses in play.
- In most cases, if the ball is going to be found, it will be found within the first 3 minutes.
- The total delay for a lost ball can be much longer than the search time alone; for example, it may take 10 minutes or longer to look unsuccessfully for a tee shot including the 5 minutes for search, the walk back to the tee to play another ball under penalty of stroke and distance, and the walk back down the hole to where that ball comes to rest.
- The time taken in each ball search can also have a negative impact on the pace of play of following groups; when there are multiple long ball searches, the cumulative delay can be major for all those playing on the course.
- Although this change may increase the number of lost balls, on average the overall impact should be to speed up play.
- Knowing that the search time is limited to 3 minutes should encourage players to play a provisional ball when they believe there is a chance their ball may not be found.