

Difference between a Substituted Ball and a Wrong Ball

[originally published in 2009, Golf Coaches Association of America *Rules Corner*]

Unfortunately, without the intent to do so, a player will sometimes unintentionally make a stroke at a ball other than the one that was hit from the teeing area. The question arises as to whether the player has made a stroke at a wrong ball or a substituted ball.

Consider the following situation.

In a stroke play competition, two players, A and B, hit their tee shots into trees bordering the fairway. When they arrive where the balls are likely to be, A sees a ball on a cart path, which is incorrectly identified as that of B. A finds another ball adjacent to the cart path in heavy rough and chips it into the fairway. B lifts the ball on the cart path, takes relief according to the obstruction Rule (Rule 16.1b) and plays the ball into the fairway. When the players arrive in the fairway to play the two balls again, they realize that they have exchanged balls, that is, the ball on the cart path was that of A and the ball in the rough was that of B.

They mistakenly conclude that each has played a wrong ball with a two-stroke penalty (Rule 6.3c(1)) but call for an official for confirmation. The official correctly makes the following ruling:

The ball played by A was B's ball in play and thus A has made a stroke at a wrong ball. A gets a penalty of two strokes and must correct this mistake by replacing the original ball or another ball on the original spot, which if not known must be estimated - see Rule 6.3c(2):

Rule 6.3c(2) *What to Do When Player's Ball is Played by Someone Else as a Wrong Ball.* The player must *replace* the original ball or another ball on the original spot (which if not known must be estimated).

Thus, A must estimate the spot where A's original ball lay when it was lifted from the cart path by B and place a ball as near as possible to that spot.

The ball played by B was a substituted ball because the ball was dropped with the intent of putting it into play even though it was not B's original ball in play. Since B did not know the location of the original ball at the time the substituted ball was dropped, B was required to proceed under the lost ball Rule (Rule 18.2b), in which case the substitution was permitted. Since the substituted ball was not played from the teeing area as required by the lost ball Rule, B played from a wrong place. In stroke play, B gets a penalty of one stroke under the lost ball Rule and an additional penalty of two strokes

for playing from a wrong place (Rule 14.7). Since the breach of playing from a wrong place was serious, B will be disqualified unless the mistake is corrected by playing again from the teeing area (Rule 14.7b). The stroke from the wrong place doesn't count in B's score for the hole.

This ruling clearly illustrates the difference between a wrong ball and a substituted ball. The key facts are [1] A made a stroke at a ball that A never put into play, thus it was a wrong ball, and [2] B made a stroke at a ball that was not his original ball but one that B put into play by dropping it, thus it was a substituted ball.

References from the 2019 Rules of Golf to note the differences in meaning between substituted ball and wrong ball:

Substitute

To change the ball the player is using to play a hole by having another ball become the ball *in play*.

The player has *substituted* another ball when he or she puts that ball *in play* in any way (see Rule 14.4) instead of the player's original ball, whether the original ball was:

- *In play*, or
- No longer *in play* because it had been lifted from the *course* or was *lost* or *out of bounds*.

A *substituted ball* is the player's ball *in play* even if:

- It was *replaced*, *dropped* or *placed* in a wrong way or *wrong place*, or
- The player was required under the Rules to put the original ball back *in play* rather than to *substitute* another ball.

Wrong Ball

Any ball other than the player's:

- Ball *in play* (whether the original ball or a *substituted ball*),
- *Provisional ball* (before it is abandoned under Rule 18.3c) or
- Second ball in *stroke play* played under Rule 14.7b or Rule 20.1c.

Examples of a *wrong ball* are:

- Another player's ball *in play*.
- A stray ball.
- The player's own ball that is *out of bounds*, has become *lost* or has been lifted and not yet put back *in play*.