

Rule Tip of the Week

Intentionality

Prior to making a ruling, is it important to know what the player was intending to do? If and when should his intention matter? What if the player had no intention of doing what he did, e.g., his action was accidental or by mistake? The purpose of this article is to make you aware of “*intentionality*” (for lack of a better word) within the Rules, i.e., the concept and consequences of the player forming an intent (or not) leading to his taking a particular action.

Note that the Rules and Decisions use various words and phrases to indicate when a player has formed a particular intent. Such words include “*intent*,” “*intentional*,” “*with the intention*,” “*deliberately*,” “*for the purpose of*,” and “*the purposeful act*.” Meanwhile, other words or phrases highlight when the player has not formed a particular intent. These words include “*accidentally*,” “*unintentionally*,” “*by mistake*,” “*mistakenly*,” and “*inadvertently*.”

By way of several examples from the Decisions, let’s try to get our minds around “*intentionality*.” You will see that, in most cases, understanding the individual’s intention (or lack thereof) is vital to making the correct ruling. However, in some situations, the individual’s intention is irrelevant. You will also see that the intention (or lack thereof) of a caddie will be imputed to his player. This is consistent with the statement in Rule 6 [The Player] that “*During a stipulated round, for any breach of a Rule by his caddie, the player incurs the applicable penalty.*”

- Decision 1-2/1 [Line of Putt Altered Purposely by Opponent or Fellow-Competitor by Stepping on It] is an example of a player acting intentionally to influence the movement of a ball. As this is a clear violation of Rule 1-2 [Exerting Influence on Ball], the player must be penalized.

Compare the foregoing to Decision 16-1a/12 [Player Walks on Line of Putt] which indicates that knowing the intent of the player is crucial to the ruling. If the player intentionally walks on his line of putt, then he is penalized under Rule 16-1a [Touching Line of Putt]. However, if he accidentally walks on his line of putt, there is no penalty unless his inadvertent action improved his line of putt.

- The definition of “*stroke*” advises that it is the forward movement of the club made with the intention of striking at and moving the ball. Consider “*intentionality*” within Decision 18-2a/20 [Ball in Play Moved Accidentally by Practice Swing]. Here, the player had no intention of moving the ball with his practice swing. Thus, his practice swing was not a stroke. Nevertheless, he is penalized under Rule 18-2a [Ball at Rest Moved By Player] even though the player had no intention of moving his ball in play.
- Decision 4-4a/6 [Excess Club Put in Player’s Golf Bag After Player Has Counted His Clubs at 1st Tee; Error Discovered After Player Has Started Round] rules that the player is penalized under Rule 4-4 [Maximum of 14 Clubs] even though he had no intention of carrying an extra club.

In a similar vein, who can forget the reaction of Ian Woosnam when, at the 2nd hole of the final round of the 2001 Open Championship at Royal Lytham & St. Annes, he realized that he would be penalized two strokes for starting his round with more than 14 clubs because his caddie had mistakenly left an extra driver in his golf bag?

- Decision 20-4/2 [Ball Lifted from Putting Green and Placed by Caddie Behind Marker] informs us that “*The ball is not considered to be in play until it is repositioned with the intention of replacing the ball as required by Rule 16-1b.*” Therefore, if the caddie did not intend to put the ball back in play, the ball remained out of play. If the player then made a stroke with his ball while it was out of play, he would be penalized for playing a wrong ball (match play: loss of hole; stroke play: two strokes).

On the other hand, if the caddie intended to put the ball back in play behind the marker, the ball was in play, but in a wrong place. Then, if the player did not replace the ball in the correct place, i.e., in front of the marker, he would be penalized for playing from a wrong place. In match play, that penalty would be loss of hole. In stroke play, that penalty would be two strokes. Additionally in stroke play, the player would be penalized another stroke for having a person not permitted by Rule 20-3a [Placing and Replacing By Whom and Where] replace the ball.