

Rule Tip of the Week

Padraig's Faux Pas

It is very difficult to see it in the adjacent sequence of photographs, but Padraig Harrington accidentally caused his ball to move ever so slightly when he picked up his ball-marker on the 7th green in the first round of the Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship.

Padraig signed his score card for a 65, just one stroke off the lead without realizing that he had incurred a penalty under Rule 18-2 [Ball at Rest Moved By Player]. That Rule states in part,

When a player's ball is in play, if ... the player ... causes it to move, the player incurs a penalty of one stroke. If the ball is moved, it must be replaced If a player who is required to replace a ball fails to do so ... he incurs the general penalty for breach of Rule 18

The general penalty in stroke play for a breach of Rule 18 is two strokes, so Padraig should have signed for a 67 for his round.

It is unfortunate that Padraig did not realize that he had inadvertently moved his ball. Had he realized his faux pas, he could have replaced the ball without penalty because Rule 20-3 [Placing and Replacing] advises:

If a ball or ball-marker is accidentally moved in the process of placing or replacing the ball, the ball or ball-marker must be replaced. There is no penalty, provided the movement of the ball or ball-marker is directly attributable to the specific act of placing or replacing the ball or removing the ball-marker....

Having been notified by a television viewer of a possible Rules infraction after play had been completed for the day, representatives of the European Tour reviewed the videotape of the incident. The Rules officials confirmed that the position of Padraig's ball did in fact change when he picked up his ball-marker. The super slow motion footage revealed that the ball moved forward about three dimples and rocked back only about half that much. Since Padraig did not include the mandatory two-stroke penalty in his score for the 7th hole, he was informed the next morning that he was disqualified under Rule 6-6d [Scoring in Stroke Play – Wrong Score for Hole]. That particular Rule states:

The competitor is responsible for the correctness of the score recorded for each hole on his score card. If he returns a score for any hole lower than actually taken, he is disqualified.

His faux pas cost Harrington a chance to contend for the £285,000 first place prize money for the event. Note that, had the ball returned to its original position, there would have been no penalty! Decision 18/1 [Ball Moves Vertically Downwards] and Decision 18/2 [Ball Oscillates During Address] point out that a ball has not "moved" under the Rules if it returns to its original position.

