Provisional Ball

Rule 18.3 exists for just one reason — it allows a player to play a provisional ball in certain situations to save time as a player may continue the play of a hole without returning to the spot of the last stroke if the original ball is lost outside of a penalty area or out of bounds. The Rule is not designed to allow the player a practice stroke or to put two balls into play in case the first ball played is unplayable or lost in a penalty area.

When and how to play a provisional ball and the procedure for doing so must be followed precisely. Many players have played a provisional ball when they were not allowed to, or failed to follow the procedure properly, resulting in further penalty, which could include disqualification.

Test your knowledge regarding the proper play of a provisional ball with the following questions.

Question: True / False

1. A provisional ball may be played any time the original ball may be out of bounds or lost.
2. A player intending to play a provisional ball must announce his or her intention by using the word “provisional” or making it clear that the ball will be put into play provisionally under Rule 18.3.
3. A provisional ball must be played before the player goes forward to search for the original ball.
4. A provisional ball may be played even if the original ball could be lost in a penalty area.
5. The provisional ball must be abandoned if the original ball is found anywhere on the course.
6. If the original ball is not found, but it is known or virtually certain to be in a penalty area, the player may continue with the provisional ball.
7. Making a second stroke at the provisional ball from a spot farther from the hole than where the original ball is estimated to be makes it the ball in play and the original ball must not be played.
8. If a player finds both the original ball and the provisional ball in the same area but is unable to identify which ball is the original or provisional, both balls are considered lost and the player must return to the spot of the previous stroke and put another ball into play.
9. In stroke play, a player properly plays a provisional ball for the original ball that might be out of bounds. The original ball is found but the player is uncertain if it is out of bounds. The provisional ball may be used as a second ball and the hole completed with both balls.
10. If a player plays a provisional ball when there is no reasonable chance that the original ball is lost outside of a penalty area or out of bounds, the provisional ball becomes the ball in play under penalty of stroke and distance.