

# Rule Tip of the Week Draft Day?

While the NFL conducts its draft day in late-spring every year, golfers at any level may have to deal with a “draft day” of a different sort any time there are windy conditions and the greens are fast and sloping.

The relevant Rule for golfing “draft days” is Rule 18-1 [Ball at Rest Moved by Outside Agency], coupled with the Definition of “Outside Agency.” Rule 18-1 states, “If a ball at rest is moved by an outside agency, there is no penalty and the ball must be replaced.” The Note to this Rule points out: “In order to apply this Rule, it must be known or virtually certain that an outside agency has moved the ball. **In the absence of such knowledge or certainty, the player must play the ball as it lies.**” [Emphasis added]

Meanwhile, the Definition of “Outside Agency” makes it clear that wind is not an outside agency. So, if it is known or virtually certain that a draft or gust of wind caused a ball at rest to move, then the player must play the ball as it lies at its new position.

Dustin Johnson encountered a “draft day” during the final round of the 2015 Masters Tournament. At the par-4 7<sup>th</sup> hole, Dustin’s approach shot came to rest about 20 feet behind the hole. However, as he was surveying his forthcoming putt (see top photograph), his ball suddenly started rolling down the slope, ending up 15 feet closer to the hole. Dustin, knowing that neither he, nor any outside agency, had caused his ball to move, realized that he would have to play his ball from where it came to rest. Acknowledging his good fortune, Dustin fist-pumped the air (see lower photograph) on his way to making the birdie putt.



What if Dustin was not aware of the foregoing, and thought he was supposed to return the ball to its original position? According to Decision 18-2a/7 [Ball Moved by Wind Replaced], had Dustin returned his ball to its original location, he would have been penalized one penalty stroke under Rule 18-2a [Ball at Rest Moved by Player ...] for moving his ball in play. Furthermore, had Dustin then putted his ball from its original location, he would have incurred an additional penalty stroke, or a total of two penalty strokes.



There are a couple of other Decisions that pertain to golfing “draft days.” In Decision 18-1/12 [Ball Replaced and at Rest Is Thereafter Moved by Wind], a player had marked, lifted and replaced his ball on the putting green, and the ball was at rest. Before the player addressed the ball, a gust of wind caused the ball to move to a different location. This Decision notes that wind is not an outside agency. Therefore, the player correctly played the ball from its new location.

In one of the scenarios discussed in Decision 20-3d/1 [Placed Ball Rolls into Hole], the player replaced his ball on the putting green. Prior to the player addressing the ball, the ball rolled into the hole! In this case, since the ball, when replaced, was at rest on the spot on which it was placed before it started rolling, the player is deemed to have holed out with his previous stroke.

In Decision 20-4/1 [Ball Replaced in Putting Green But Ball-Marker Not Removed; Ball Then Moves], a player marked, lifted and replaced his ball on the putting green. However, he did not remove his ball-marker. Prior to addressing the ball, wind moved his ball to a new location. This Decision points out that, under Rule 20-4 [When Ball Dropped or Placed Is In Play], a ball is in play when it is replaced, whether or not the object used to mark its position has been removed. Thus, the player must play the ball from its new position.