

# Rule Tip of the Week Highly Questionable

This article has nothing to do with the ESPN sports talk show of the same name. Instead, the title is a play on words as this article examines, by means of a series of questions, what you may or may not do when you see a ball that might be yours high up in a tree that is situated through the green.



*How long do you have to identify your ball before it becomes lost?*

Per Rule 27-1c [Ball Not Found Within Five Minutes], a ball is lost if you are unable to find and identify your ball within five (5) minutes of searching for it.

*May you climb the tree to identify and play your ball as it lies in the tree?*

Yes, but if the ball falls to the ground as a result of your climbing the tree, you would be penalized one stroke under Rule 18-2 [Ball at Rest Moved by Player ....] and you would be required to replace the ball. See Decision 18-2/26 [Ball Dislodged from Tree When Player Climbs Tree to Play Stroke].

*If you successfully climb the tree and are able to identify your ball, are you penalized for causing your ball to move if your weight bends the branch within which your ball is resting?*

Although your ball has moved relative to the ground, it has not moved relative to its position in the branch. Therefore, per Decision 18/3 [Ball in Fork of Tree Moves in Relation to Ground But Not in Relation to Fork], the ball is deemed not to have moved, so there is no penalty under Rule 18-2.

*Instead of climbing the tree, by what other means might you identify your ball within five minutes?*

You may use an optical device such as binoculars, a camera with a zoom lens, a distance-measuring device, etc., per Decision 27/14 [Ball in Tree Identified But Not Retrieved].

*May you use or replace your club if it becomes non-conforming or its playing characteristics are changed as a result of your throwing the club up into the tree in an attempt to dislodge and retrieve the ball?*

No, per Rule 4-3b [Damage Other Than in Normal Course of Play]. According to Decision 4-3/1 [Meaning of Damage Sustained in "Normal Course of Play"], throwing a club, whether in anger, in retrieving a ball, or otherwise, is an act which is not considered in the "normal course of play" as used in Rule 4-3 [Damaged Clubs; Repair and Replacement].



*What must you do before you dislodge your ball by shaking the tree or throwing an object at the ball in the tree in order to avoid incurring a penalty under Rule 18-2 for moving your ball in play?*

Per Decision 18-2/27 [Player Wishes to Dislodge Ball in Tree and Proceed Under Unplayable Ball Rule], before any movement of your ball occurs, you must announce that you intend to proceed under Rule 28 [Ball Unplayable] if it is not reasonable to assume from your actions that you intend to proceed under the unplayable ball Rule.

*Having announced in advance your intentions to proceed under Rule 28 with its one-stroke penalty, how may you proceed after you have dislodged the ball from the tree and identified the ball as yours?*

Per Rule 28a, one option would be to play a ball as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was last played.

Per Rule 28b, using the point on the ground immediately below the place where the ball lay in the tree, you could drop a ball behind that point, keeping that point directly between the hole and the spot on which the ball is dropped, with no limit to how far behind that point the ball may be dropped.

Per Rule 28c, you could drop a ball within two club-lengths of, and no nearer the hole than, the point on the ground immediately below the place where the ball lay in the tree. See Decision 28/11 [Ball Unplayable in Tree and Player Opts to Drop Within Two Club-Lengths].

*If your ball was located in a tree limb overhanging the putting green, and you elected to proceed under Rule 28c, would you drop or place your ball on the putting green?*

Per Decision 28/11 [Ball Unplayable in Tree and Player Opts to Drop Within Two Club-Lengths], you would be required to drop your ball on the putting green within two club-lengths of, and no nearer the hole than, the point on the ground immediately below the place where the ball lay in the tree. If you placed, rather than dropped, your ball on the putting green, and then putted your ball, you would be penalized loss of hole in match play or two strokes in stroke play for playing from a wrong place! See Decision 20-6/1 [Ball Placed When Required to Be Dropped or Dropped When Required to Be Placed; Correction of Error].