BY STEVE BIRKY



TIMING IS EVERYTHING

When making a claim in match play, several factors help to determine whether it's legit or too late

nforcement of the rules in match play is the responsibility of the players, not a rules committee as in stroke play.

The reason for this is that in match play, a rules violation only affects the two players or sides involved; in stroke play, it affects the entire field.

In stroke play, if a player is unsure of the proper procedure, he can play two balls under Rule 3-3. In match play, however, Rule 2-5 applies.

If a player believes his opponent has made a rules violation, he must make a claim and state that he is doing so. In other words, "I think you've made a mistake. You took more than a two-club-length drop," would be appropriate, and this must be done before either player plays from the subsequent tee after the particulars of the situation

become known.

However, this could be a number of holes later if a player was unaware of something his opponent did. Usually, the only time the rules committee gets involved is if an opponent disagrees with the claim.

Rule 2-5 states that players must continue play and settle the dispute "in a timely manner," which means until a member of the rules committee is available to settle the dispute.

So, imagine a scenario in which two players are late in a match, and during a conversation as they are leaving the 15th tee, Player A mentions that he was rather lucky on the 13th hole. He goes on to explain that after he hit a ball over the green, he went to hit his pitch shot, and after he hit a ball only a few yards, he found another ball next to the one he just hit.

This ball turned out to be his original ball, which he said he would never have found if he hadn't hit the other ball up next to it. He said he was then able to hit his original onto the green and two-putt for a par to beat Player B's bogey.

B, who hadn't seen any of this occur, says he believes A incurred a loss-of-hole penalty for hitting a wrong ball and that he is now making a claim. A says he doesn't think it's a lossof-hole penalty and, even if it is, it's too late to call because it occurred almost two holes ago.

They finish 18 with the match all square (providing A won the 13th hole). They ask the club's head professional, who is authorized by the committee to resolve disputes, to make a ruling. The professional rightly rules that under Rule 15-3a, playing a wrong ball in match play is a loss-of-hole penalty. As to the

timing of the claim, according to Rules 2-5 and 9-2a, and Decision 9-2/8, B's claim was made in a timely manner since he was unaware of A's actions until the 15th hole. So it is B that wins the 13th hole and the match, 1 up.

When A stated how lucky he was, if B, unaware of the rule, had said "You get all the breaks," and then one of them had teed off at the 16th hole, it would have been too late for the claim. So if someone came to B during the play of the 16th hole and told him about the rule, he couldn't make a claim since he knew the facts prior to teeing off at the 16th.

B also could have ignored A's rules violation. If B was 3 up and his drive was in the middle of the fairway on 15 and A was in great trouble, B might assume he was going to win the match anyway and it would be less contentious just to let it go. This is a situation that only occurs in match play because, as stated earlier, it only affects those players in the match.

Steve Birky is a member of the CDGA's Rules Education Committee.