



## #RulesToThe Max

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**A player must not create a potential advantage by using equipment (other than a club or a ball) that artificially eliminates or reduces the need for a skill or judgment that is essential to the challenge of the game.**

## HOLD THE PHONE!

As much as cell phones and other telecommunication technology have become so prominent in our lives over the last decade or so, the events of 2020 have made digital tech even more central to our lives. Most of our business meetings and social visits with friends are done over Zoom these days, so we've found ourselves leaning on our phones and computers almost all the time, whether at work or when we're off the clock. As much as this technology has helped us maintain our business and personal relationships while social distancing, cell phones can also be helpful to golfers while they're on the course. As such, it has become necessary for the Rules of Golf to address what golfers are allowed to do with their cell phones and other devices during their round. Most of this info can be found in Rule 4.3a in greater detail, but I'll touch on a few of the major points. Use of cell phones during a round has become one of the most common topics of phone calls I get from Professionals while they officiate their

member events, so I hope this summary will help you educate your members and officiate your competitions at the club.

The over-arching principle behind these Rules is stated at the beginning of Rule 4.3a: "a player must not create a potential advantage by using equipment (other than a club or a ball) that artificially eliminates or reduces the need for a skill or judgment that is essential to the challenge of the game." Please keep this in mind while reading, since even if you don't memorize the do's and don'ts listed below, remembering this overriding principle will help steer you towards the right answer intuitively.

So what are we allowed to do with our phones and other devices during a round?

### **DISTANCE AND DIRECTION**

**DO:** Use a GPS app to obtain distance information, or use the compass app to determine direction.

Distance and north/south direction are publicly available information, so have at it!

**DON'T:** Use an app that recommends what club to hit, shows elevation change, or recommends a line of play. Golfers are expected to make these judgments themselves, and this is part of the challenge of the game.

### **WEATHER/WIND INFORMATION**

**DO:** Use a weather app and take advantage of anything it tells you based on its weather forecast. This includes wind speed and direction!

**DON'T:** Measure wind speed at the golf course. The difference here is while you're allowed to learn wind information on your weather app, there are limits to how specific that information is allowed to be. You're allowed to know the prevailing wind in your general geographical area, but not specifically on the spot where you're standing.

**DON'T:** Use an artificial object for the sole purpose of getting wind-related information. For example, if a player takes out a handkerchief for the sole purpose of holding it in the air to see which way the wind is blowing, they are in breach of Rule 4.3. However, if they take it out to blow their nose and happen to notice that that wind is blowing it a certain direction, that's no problem.

### **INFORMATION RECORDING OR GATHERING**

**DO:** Use information that was gathered before the round begun (such as information from previous rounds, swing tips, or club recommendations).

**DON'T:** Process or interpret playing information from the round (such as club recommendations based on current round distances).



**DO:** Record, for use after the round, playing information (club distance, playing statistics, etc.) or physiological information from your Fitbit (heart rate, etc.).

**DON'T:** Use any of the recorded information above to help you during the same round in which it was recorded.

### **AUDIO/VIDEO**

**DO:** Listen to background music during the round.

**DON'T:** Listen to music for the purpose of eliminating distractions or helping with swing tempo. The easy, general way to interpret this is that a speaker in the golf cart is generally fine, but wearing headphones during the

round is generally not, as it would help eliminate the distraction of a car horn beeping in your backswing, for example. Just remember that there are nuances, and a conversation with the player should always take place before making a ruling.

**DO:** Watch videos unrelated to the competition being played.

**DON'T:** Watch videos showing your own play, or the play of others in the competition, that helps you in choosing a club, making a stroke, or deciding how to play during the round. I recently got a call from a Professional about a member who had his partner videotape one of his swings, then viewed the video. This player was in breach of Rule 4.3a(4) because he could analyze his swing and correct flaws during the round.

**DO:** Watch video that is being shown publicly during the round. If there is video being shown for the benefit of spectators at a competition, and a player is able to see a public screen showing live coverage of the competition, statistical information, wind speed or the like, there is no penalty under Rule 4.3. This is true even if it helps the player choose a club, make a stroke, or decide how to play.

Since your cell phone is probably always within reach during a round, I hope this helps to understand when you can confidently reach for it, and when you should leave it in the cart. As always, reach out if you have any questions, and I'll look forward to seeing you in the spring!