

# Rule Tip of the Week

## All En.compass.ing

During the third round of the 2018 Travelers Championship at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, CT, Bryson DeChambeau was seen using a drawing compass (also known as a bow compass) to check something on one of the putting green diagrams in his yardage book. When asked about the use of this instrument, the physics graduate from Southern Methodist University was quoted as saying, *“I’m figuring out true pin locations. The pin locations are just a little bit off every once in a while, and so I’m making sure they’re in the exact spot.”*



The PGA Tour questioned his use of this type of compass, but did not penalize him as there was no precedent or published Decision by the USGA regarding the use of this device. Upon reviewing this matter, the USGA determined, within a few days of the incident, that DeChambeau’s use of this type of compass is a violation of Rule 14-3 [Artificial Devices and Unusual Equipment; Abnormal Use of Equipment]. This Rule states, in part:



*“Rule 14-3 governs the use of equipment and devices (including electronic devices) that might assist a player in making a specific stroke or generally in his play.*

*Golf is a challenging game in which success should depend on the judgement, skills and abilities of the player. This principle guides the USGA in determining whether the use of any item is a breach of Rule 14-3. ...*

*Except as provided in the Rules, during a stipulated round the player must not use any artificial device or unusual equipment, or use any equipment in an abnormal manner:*

- a. That might assist him in making a stroke or in his play; or*
- b. For the purpose of gauging or measuring distance or conditions that might affect his play;...*

The penalty for a breach of Rule 14-3 in stroke play is two strokes for a first offense, and disqualification for a subsequent offense during a stipulated round.

The USGA concluded that a drawing compass is unusual equipment and any use during a stipulated round that might assist a player in his or her play is a breach of Rule 14-3a. According to John Bodenheimer of the USGA. *“With some of these sorts of devices, it can be difficult lines to draw on what’s permissible and what is not permissible, but here, we drew the line there with Rule 14-3.”*

This is not the first time that the USGA has condemned the use of an item during a stipulated round. Consider, for example, Decision 14-3/11 [Plumb-Line], Decision 14-3/12.5 [Bottled Drink Used as a Level], and Decision 14-3/13-5 [Golf Ball Artificially Warmed].

Nor is this the first time that the USGA has addressed the use of a compass! Per Decision 14-3/4 [Use of Compass During Round], the USGA has blessed the use of a navigational compass. This Decision discusses using a navigational compass to help determine the direction of the wind or the direction that the grass is growing on a putting green. The USGA has concluded that this is not a breach of Rule 14-3 because a navigational compass only provides directional information and does not gauge or measure variable conditions or assists the player in his play.



Even if DeChambeau had used the drawing compass more than once during his stipulated round, he was immune from being penalized after the event for his breach of Rule 14-3 thanks to Rule 34-1b [Disputes and Decisions: Stroke Play]. That Rule states, in part, *“In stroke play, a penalty must not be rescinded, modified or imposed after the competition has closed. ...Exceptions: A penalty of disqualification must be imposed after the competition has closed if a competitor ... (iv) knew, before the competition closed, that he had been in breach of any other Rule for which the penalty is disqualification.”*