

Rule Tip of the Week

TMI Interpretation

After a 6-week feedback period, the USGA has issued an “interpretation” regarding the limitations on the green-reading materials that players will be permitted to use as of January 1, 2019. The following “Interpretation on Putting Green Information” is a clarification of forthcoming Rule 4.3a (Allowed and Prohibited Uses of Equipment) which reads as follows: “A player may use equipment to help his or her play during a round, except that 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 judgement that is essential to the challenge of the game....”



Photo courtesy of the USGA

Purpose of Interpretation:

Rule 4.3 limits the use of equipment and devices that might help a player in his or her play, based on the principle that golf is a challenging game in which success should depend on the judgment, skills and abilities of the player. This interpretation of Rule 4.3 limits the size and scale of detailed putting green maps and any similar electronic or digital materials that a player may use during a round to help with reading his or her line of play on the putting green so that a player’s ability to read a green remains an essential part of the skill of putting.

Putting Green Maps

The player is allowed to use a putting green map or other putting green information, except that:

- Any image of a putting green must be limited to a scale of 3/8 inch to 5 yards (1:480) or smaller (the “scale limit”);
- Any book or other paper containing a map or image of a putting green must not be larger than 4 ¼ inches x 7 inches (the “size limit”), although a “hole location sheet” that displays 9 or more holes on a single sheet of paper may be larger, provided that any image of a single putting green meets the scale limit;
- No magnification of putting green information is allowed other than a player’s normal wearing of prescription glasses or lenses;
- Hand drawn or written information about a putting green is only allowed if contained in a book or paper meeting the size limit and written by the player and/or his or her caddie.

Electronic or Digital Putting Green Maps

In electronic or digital form, any image of a putting green must meet the above scale and size limits. Even when an electronic or digital putting green map meets the above limits, the player is still in breach of Rule 4.3 if the player uses any device in a manner not consistent with the purpose of these limits, such as by:

- Increasing the size of the green’s representation beyond the scale or size limits;
- Producing a recommended line of play based on the location (or estimated location) of the player’s ball (see Rule 4.3a(1)).

In commenting on this interpretation, Thomas Pagel, the USGA’s Senior Managing Director of Governance noted, “*These latest modifications provide very practical changes that make the interpretation easier to understand and apply in the field. We’re thankful for everyone’s willingness to provide feedback as we worked through the process of identifying a clear interpretation that protects the essential skill of reading a green, while still allowing for information that helps golfers enjoy the game.*”

David Rickman, Pagel’s counterpart at The R&A, pointed out, “*It is important that we take steps to ensure that skill and judgment are the main determinants of success in reading the greens. The new interpretation is a first step in the process and we will keep green-reading materials under review in 2019 to assess whether any further action is required.*”

