

Rule Tip of the Week Driven to the Breaking Point?

Last week during the Shell Houston Open, Phil Mickelson used a 9.5° loft Callaway RAZR Hawk Tour driver with a Mitsubishi Fubuki A70 shaft. However, when he hoisted the winner's trophy on Sunday, he did not have the same exact driver in his bag that he began the tournament with on Thursday.



During the middle of the first round, Mickleson noticed what he thought was a crack in the titanium face of his driver so he asked a Rules Official if he could replace the driver on the basis that it was damaged and unfit for use. The applicable Rule is Rule 4-3 [Damaged Clubs: Repair and Replacement]:

a. Damage in Normal Course of Play

If, during a stipulated round, a player's club is damaged in the normal course of play, he may:

- (i) use the club in its damaged state for the remainder of the stipulated round; or
- (ii) without unduly delaying play, repair it or have it repaired; or
- (iii) as an additional option available only if the club is unfit for play, replace the damaged club with any club. The replacement of the club must not unduly delay play and must not be made by borrowing any club selected for play by any other person playing on the course.

Note: A club is unfit for play if it is substantially damaged, e.g., the shaft is dented, significantly bent or broken into pieces; the clubhead becomes loose, detached or significantly deformed; or the grip becomes loose. A club is not unfit for play solely because the club's lie or loft has been altered, or the clubhead is scratched.

The Rules Official determined that the driver was not unfit for play so Mickleson completed the round with that driver before replacing it with a backup driver for the remainder of the event. During the Golf Channel's broadcast, Rules Official Stephen Cox explained the ruling by noting "*Although you could see a blemish, it really needs to be some separation in the clubface.*"

In support of the ruling, Tim Buckman of Callaway Golf noted that, "*Phil swings the club with extreme force and makes consistent contact within a very targeted area on the clubface. On the high-strength titanium that we use, it is not uncommon for a marking to appear that resembles a crack, even though the clubface is completely intact.*"