

Non-Conforming Club - Matt Every



There was an unusual disqualification at the Sony Open in Hawaii last Friday and to the credit of the player involved, it was he who drew attention to his transgression. Matt Every, last year's winner of the Arnold Palmer Invitational PGA Tour event, was disqualified for a breach of Rule 4-1, because he used a club that he had damaged other than in the normal course of play, which made it non-conforming. The circumstance was that Every had substantially bent his 4-iron, "out of frustration", on the 18th hole of his opening round

on Thursday. The following report of Every's explanation, as to how the club remained in his bag on the second day of the event, is taken from Stephanie Wei's excellent 'Wei Under Par' blog;

"There's no good a bent club can do in my bag, obviously, so I was planning to throw it away (after the first round)," said Every. "Then on the range this morning, I was using it as an alignment stick because it's only bent on the bottom and you can't really tell."

Once again, Every wanted to throw it away, but instead, he ended up putting it upside-down in his bag, so you could only see the butt of the grip.

"At some point between then and my 9th hole (18) today, it got turned back to normal," he said. "I was looking down and just grabbed the 4-iron out of the bag. It wasn't bent bad, just at the bottom there was a curve. If you were setting it up to hit a shot, you wouldn't be able to tell."

"I was giving the club back to (my caddie) Derek (Mason) and my hands went to the middle of the club and I could tell it was bent. I was like, 'Oh, shoot.' I knew a new 4-iron didn't get put in the bag overnight."

Every admitted that he was familiar with the Rule and knew right away that it was a breach. He then called over an official who confirmed that he was indeed disqualified. What surprises me about this conversation is that another report on the incident quotes PGA Rules official, John Mutch as saying;

"He asked for a second opinion on the bend. The bend in this club was about 10 inches up from the neck. It was substantial."

So, Every was familiar with the Rule, knew that he had breached it, asked an official to confirm the penalty, but he still sought a second opinion!

Had Every taken the club out of his bag after finishing his round on Thursday he would not have incurred any penalty. However, as it was a stroke play competition, as soon as he started his round the following day with the non-conforming (bent) club he was subject to a penalty of two strokes for each hole at which any breach occurred, with a maximum penalty per round of four strokes; but because he used the club in its damaged state on his 9th hole the penalty incurred increased to disqualification.

To summarise;

- It is Rule 4 that deals with clubs.
- A club that has a significant bend in its shaft is non-conforming.
- If the club is damaged during the **normal course of play** it may be used, repaired or replaced during the round, but not otherwise. (Note that Decision 4-3/1 * clarifies what is meant by normal course of play.)
- A player incurs a penalty for starting a round with a non-conforming club.
- A player is disqualified for using a non-conforming club during a round.