

Know Your Rules

By John Vander Borght, Manager Junior Tour



The equipment we play with has been through many changes since Old Tom Morris used hickory-shafted “play-clubs” and feathery balls.

From simple wooden clubs to persimmon-headed drivers and on to the 460 CC titanium monsters played today, the game has evolved. Irons have similarly gone through significant changes from the mashie-niblick to the 9-iron and today’s 64-degree wedges. The ball goes much farther than it did back in Bobby Jones’ day. With hickory, then steel and finally graphite shafts and “U” or box grooves that can slice the cover on the ball, the best golfers have more control and power than ever.

Many purists in the game have called for rollbacks in the ball, club or other areas. The USGA and R&A became concerned about the advances in technology as far back as the 1920s. Over the years rules have been introduced to try to keep the skill in the game. In 2002, the ruling bodies issued a Joint Statement of Principles, stating that if the increases in distance continued, they would be obliged to take action.

In February 2007, a Notice to Manufacturers was issued regarding groove configuration. In August of 2008, the final version of the new regulations was announced. The concern is that the “U” grooves on shorter irons give players too much control on balls hit from the rough. This encourages them to hit the ball as far as possible without concern

about recovery. By regulating grooves on the clubs so players will have less control, the importance of driving accuracy will be re-established.

The return to more of a “V”-like groove means that balls hit from the rough will have less spin. The likely result is “flyers” that are harder to control and release more when they hit the green. Because of this, the player will try to hit the fairway and/or play a ball that spins more. Professional golfers are already going to the manufacturers asking for a ball with more spin. If a ball spins more, it can curve more and it also will not fly as far. Therefore, the distance and control that players have even when they mis-hit the ball will lessen.

The new regulations apply to clubs with lofts of 25 degrees or higher. Lower-lofted clubs can continue to have the older style grooves.

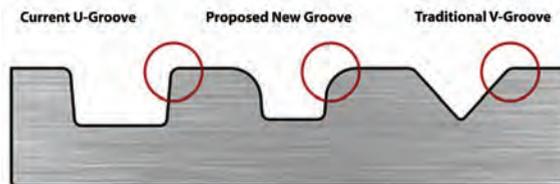
All clubs that are submitted for conformance after January 1, 2010 must meet the new regulations. But, while the clubs are changing, the rules regarding their usage in tournaments will change more slowly.

When it is desired to restrict players, an optional Condition of the Competition can be instituted that requires conforming clubs under the new regulations. The USGA has stated that it will use the Condition for

the U.S. Open, U.S. Women’s Open and U.S. Senior Open starting in 2010. The USGA recently announced that the new grooves will only be required for sectional qualifying for the U.S. Open in 2010. In 2011, you will be required to have conforming clubs at both local and sectional qualifying. The U.S. Senior Open and Women’s Open have one stage of qualifying; therefore you must have conforming clubs for those qualifiers in 2010. The PGA Tour will also implement this

will come to a final decision in the next few months. The new condition will not be implemented in 2010. The earliest the rule would be implemented is 2014 and even then, it may only be for selected events at the highest level. Since most avid golfers buy new clubs every few years, most of us will have conforming irons long before the rule ever comes into effect.

What effect will this have on golf? With clubs that don’t offer as much control



Condition of the Competition starting in 2010.

Starting in 2014, the USGA will require conforming irons for its amateur championships. It has stated that there are no plans to make current clubs “illegal” for use in other competitions until at least 2024, although any organization could choose to do so by specifying the Condition. Given that most clubs will be replaced by that time, it is possible that they will never take them away for normal use.

Where does the NCGA stand on this issue? The Championship Committee

of a ball hit from the rough players will be forced to be more creative when they are in the rough. The longer hitters will want to dial back to keep the ball in the fairway. Also, as pros use balls which spin more, they will have to become better shot makers. The need to continually lengthen golf courses should lessen, thus lowering construction and maintenance costs. Rough can also be kept shorter. Hopefully all of these things will make the game more challenging and interesting.

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