United States
Golf Association

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USGA **Information**

USGA ANNOUNCES RULING
ON U-SHAPED GROOVES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FAR HILLS, N.J. -- U-shaped grooves on golf clubs will continue to be permitted under the Rules of Golf, according to an announcement by the United States Golf Association at the conclusion of its annual meeting in Washington, D.C.

The announcement culminated an extended study by the USGA of the performance characteristics of grooves, following reports that U-shaped grooves, first allowed in 1984, have made the game easier to play, presumably because of enhanced spin rate. Prior to 1984 the Rules required that all grooves be V-shaped.

Stuart Bloch, Chairman of the USGA's Implements and Ball Committee, told representatives of USGA member clubs and golf associations that perceptions of dramatic performance differences, attributed to the shape of grooves, were not borne out by the tests.

Bloch said the USGA decision not to change the specifications regarding the shape of grooves was based on an indoor study at the USGA Research and Test Center and on analyses of data produced by outdoor player tests conducted by the PGA Tour.

The USGA study concluded that the shape of grooves does not influence spin rate when there is direct contact between the club face and a balata ball, a condition referred to as a "dry" hit.

Measurable differences in spin rate attributable to the shape of grooves do appear when grass is interposed between the club face and the ball, a condition termed "grassy" in the USGA study and analogous to a stroke in golf played from "rough."

Bloch described such differences as "inconsequential." He noted that the difference in spin rate because of the texture of different types of grasses is greater than any difference caused by groove shapes.

USGA

Moreover, according to the USGA study, whatever differences there are in spin rate caused by U grooves in "grassy" hits occur only when the cover of the ball is relatively "soft" -- when it is made of balata or a similar material.

When the cover is "hard," as is the case with balls made of the synthetic product Surlyn, not only do those differences disappear, but there is an indication that the old V grooves develop more spin than U grooves.

The study found that, while the shape of grooves is not important, the overall amount of scoring is relevant. USGA specifications require that the maximum width of any groove be .035 inches and that the space between grooves be at least three times the width of the grooves themselves.

During the USGA tests on "grassy" hits, there was a direct correlation between the amount of space between grooves and spin rate.

The USGA had announced earlier that, because of that finding, it will not modify its specifications regarding the width of grooves and the space between grooves.

Today's announcement does not affect the schedule for the implementation of the USGA method for determining the width of grooves, which was adopted during 1987, but will not be fully implemented until 1996 (Jan. 1, 1990 for USGA events).

As stated last June, when that measurement method is implemented, some clubs now being produced and sold will not conform to the Rules of Golf.

The requirement that all grooves be V-shaped was abandoned in 1984 because the USGA recognized that the manufacturing process known as investment casting, increasingly popular in the making of golf clubs, does not yield shapes in grooves that can be described as Vs.

(For additional information, contact Frank Hannigan (201) 234-2300).

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