

**United States Golf Association**  
**Golf House**  
**PO Box 708**  
**Far Hills, NJ 07931**

**March 19, 2004**

**Notice to Manufacturers**

**Proposed Putter Plain in Shape Interpretation Changes**

Putter rules have long included provisions requiring that putters meet “plain in shape” requirements to be considered conforming to the USGA Rules of Golf. The USGA has interpreted these requirements on a case-by-case basis. Maintaining historical consistency has been an important concern for the USGA. However, modern putter designs have made it more difficult for submitters to understand relevant distinctions of putter plain in shape requirements and for the USGA to maintain consistency in its application of historical precedents in the interpretation of these requirements to putters. As a result, the USGA is now proposing a modification of putter rules interpretation. If adopted, these changes should provide putter designers with a clearer understanding of what is permitted. It should also help to reduce the amount of time that is required for the USGA to evaluate putters and issue rulings.

Appendix II, 4a of the USGA Rules of Golf states:

“The clubhead must be generally plain in shape. All parts must be rigid, structural in nature and functional. It is not practicable to define plain in shape precisely and comprehensively but features which are deemed to be in breach of this requirement and are therefore not permitted include ... appendages to the main body of the head such as knobs, plates, rods or fins for the purpose of meeting dimensional specifications, for aiming, or for any other purpose. Exceptions may be made for putters....”

According to this proposal, that Rule would remain unchanged, but the ‘plain in shape’ requirement would be interpreted so that there would be more permissible “exceptions” for putters. The main change would be to permit an appendage to the main body of the head of a putter, even if the appendage is not primarily for the purpose of mass or weight distribution.

Additionally, the USGA has held that excessively large putter heads do not conform to the Rules. To better communicate this interpretation, guidelines for maximum putter head dimensions are proposed.

## **PROPOSED GUIDELINES**

### **1. Regarding Appendix II, 4a ‘Plain in Shape’ – Exceptions for Putters**

#### **Amended Guidelines:**

Features that can be used for aiming, sighting and alignment will be permitted in the following forms:

- Holes, cut-throughs and cavities through the head
- Transparent material
- Lines or other markings painted or inscribed on any part of the head
- Permanent appendages to the head, provided that:
  - the feature is rigid throughout its length (i.e., cannot be bent or flexed by hand)
  - the feature does not extend forward of the face,
  - the feature does not extend above the top line of the face by more than 0.25 inches.

Those features still not permitted under the ‘plain in shape’ Rules and guidelines are as follows:

- Appendages for the purpose of meeting dimensional specifications
- Features of any nature that extend ahead of the putter face
- Holes through the face
- Furrows in, or runners on, the sole that extend into the face
- Facsimiles of golf balls or actual golf balls incorporated into the head
- Heads designed to resemble other objects (i.e. bottles, cars, vegetables, body parts, etc.)
- Optical devices such as prisms, mirrors, reflective material, etc.
- Electronic devices such as light beams and metronomes, or mechanical devices such as spirit levels, etc.

### **2. Regarding Appendix II, 4b ‘Dimensions and Size’**

#### **Proposed Guidelines:**

- (i) The distance from the heel to the toe of the putter head must not be greater than 7 inches (177.8mm);
- (ii) The distance from the heel to the toe of the putter face must be no less than  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the distance from face to the back of the putter head;
- (iii) The distance from the heel to the toe of the putter face must be no less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  the distance from the heel to toe of the putter head;
- (iv) The distance from the sole to the top of the putter head, including any permitted features, must not be greater than 2.5 inches (63.5mm).

These new dimensional guidelines are in addition to Appendix II, 4b (ii) which states that “the dimensions of the head must be such that the distance from the heel to the toe is greater than the distance from the face to the back”. An illustration showing these dimensions is attached.

## **EFFECT ON PREVIOUS SUBMISSIONS**

It is recognized by the USGA that some putters previously submitted and ruled non-conforming to USGA Rules for violation of plain in shape requirements could be deemed conforming under the proposed new guidelines. Putter submissions which have previously been ruled in breach of the 'plain in shape' requirement will be re-evaluated at the request of the submitter or manufacturer.

## **PROPOSED TIMETABLE**

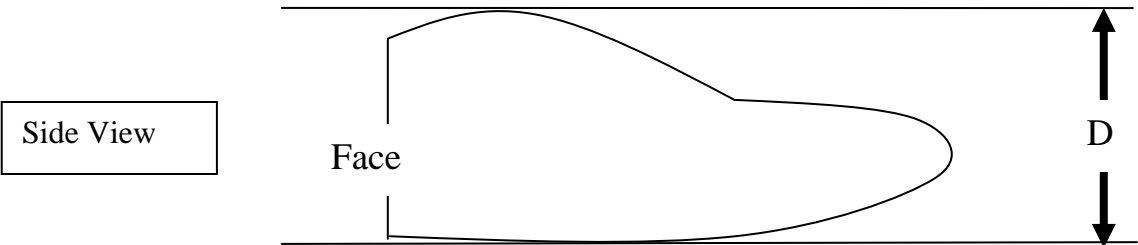
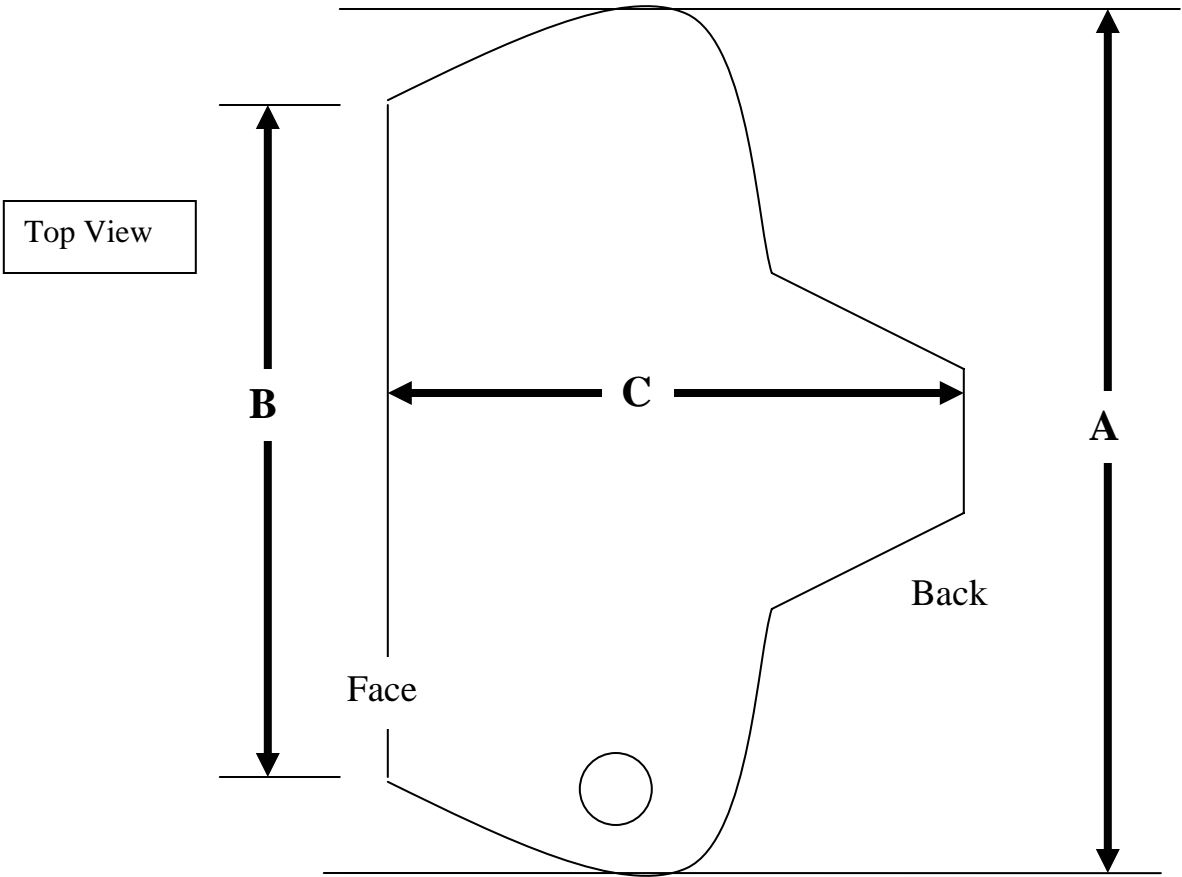
The USGA is proposing that these new interpretations be introduced as soon as possible. Therefore, manufacturers, other submitters, and other interested parties are invited to submit their comments as soon as possible.

Written comments regarding the proposed changes putter rules interpretations should be sent to the USGA, attention Dick Rugge, P.O. Box 708, Far Hills, NJ 07931, Fax 908-234-0708, e-mail: [drugge@usga.org](mailto:drugge@usga.org). Comments received later than April 30, 2004 will not be considered.

For your information, The R&A is concurrently issuing a similar notice to manufacturers.

This is a proposal, not yet an implemented change. It is possible that provisions of this proposal could change prior to adoption.

**Putter Dimensions Illustration**



$A \leq 7''$   
 $B \geq \frac{2}{3} C$   
 $B \geq \frac{1}{2} A$   
 $A \geq C$   
 $D \leq 2.5''$