

Questions & Answers: Implementation of New Rules Regarding Grooves

What is the plan for implementing the new groove rules at USGA championships?

The new rules regarding grooves will be adopted as a condition of competition for the 2010 U.S. Open, U.S. Women's Open and U.S. Senior Open, as well as sectional (final stage) qualifying events for these three championships. The condition will not be in effect at local (first stage) qualifying events for the 2010 U.S. Open or at any of the USGA's national championships and team competitions that are contested by amateurs only. There is no local (first stage) qualifying stage for the U.S. Women's Open or U.S. Senior Open.

The USGA will adopt the condition of competition for U.S. Open local qualifying beginning in 2011 and for the national championships and team competitions it conducts for amateur players no later than 2014, as originally announced.

The full text of the condition of competition appears at the end of this document.

What guidance does the USGA offer to state and regional golf associations or clubs regarding adoption of the condition of competition for local or regional competitions?

Although the condition of competition will be included in the Rules of Golf as of January 1, 2010 for committees to adopt, the USGA plans to implement the condition over a period of several years, beginning in 2010 with the U.S. Open, U.S. Women's Open, and U.S. Senior Open and their sectional (final stage) qualifying events. As originally announced, the USGA intends to adopt the condition for the championships and team events it conducts for amateur players no later than 2014. The USGA recommends that state and regional associations and clubs implement the condition in accordance with this general time frame. However, if the condition is implemented in 2014, or sooner, it is the recommendation of the USGA that this condition should be adopted only for competitions involving expert players.

What are the basics of the new groove regulations?

Although the complete technical specifications of the new groove requirements are more detailed, the following statements summarize the key changes:

- The volume of grooves is reduced.
- Groove edge sharpness is reduced for clubs with lofts greater than or equal to 25 degrees.

A common misconception is that "V" shaped grooves will be required under the new specifications and that "U" shaped grooves will no longer be allowed. This is not the

case. However, any “U” shaped groove must conform to the new specifications for both cross sectional area/spacing and edge radius.

The complete technical specifications can be found in the [Test Protocols for Equipment](#) section at www.usga.org.

Why were the rules changes made?

The changes are designed to reduce spin on shots played from the rough by highly skilled golfers, and thereby restore the challenge of shots played from the rough to the green. This should result in an increase in the importance of driving accuracy.

What is the effect of the new grooves on the average player?

The changes are expected to have little impact on the general golfing population for three reasons. First, USGA research shows that average golfers playing from the rough hit the green in regulation only 13 percent of the time. Second, two-thirds of golf balls sold are surlyn-covered balls which show little spin effect from different groove designs. Finally, all existing clubs that presently conform to the rules will continue to be deemed conforming through at least 2024, when the condition of competition is expected to become a permanent equipment specification. Consumer research shows that only 2 percent of irons are in use for more than 15 years.

How does a player determine if a club or set of clubs conforms to the new specifications?

The USGA is developing a database that will help players determine if clubs conform to the new specifications, provided the club or set of clubs has not been altered and is “as manufactured.” The database will list all irons and wedges, as well as hybrids and fairway woods with lofts greater than or equal to 25 degrees, that have been evaluated for conformance to the 2010 Rules of Golf. The database will be available on the USGA’s Web site (www.usga.org) by late October 2009.

Alternately, a player may contact the manufacturer of the clubs for information regarding conformance to the 2010 Rules of Golf.

What is the protocol if a player needs to determine the conformity of a club, or the conformity of the club’s grooves is called into question during a sectional qualifying event for the U.S. Open, U.S. Women’s Open or U.S. Senior Open?

Players are strongly encouraged to resolve any questions about club conformance prior to arriving on site for any qualifying event.

As is the case with any question on the Rules of Golf or equipment, any player who is concerned about the conformity of grooves should find the USGA official in charge of the qualifying event as soon as practicable. The first step will be to determine the make

and model of the club in question and whether the club has been included in the USGA database of clubs. If the club is listed in the database as meeting the 2010 groove specifications, has not been altered, and there are no other extenuating circumstances or other evidence of non-conformance, the club will be assumed to conform. If the club is not listed as such in the database and a determination cannot be made immediately, the player may choose to play with the club but risks disqualification if a determination is subsequently made that the club does not conform. *Field testing will not be performed at local (first stage) or sectional (final stage) qualifying sites.*

If another player calls into question the conformity of a player's grooves, as with any question that arises during the competition, the USGA Rules Committee will take all pertinent facts into consideration in evaluating the situation, and the above procedure will apply if necessary. The decision of the USGA Rules Committee will be final.

What is the protocol if a player needs to determine the conformity of a club, or the conformity of the club's grooves is called into question during the U.S. Open, U.S. Women's Open or U.S. Senior Open?

Players are strongly encouraged to resolve any questions about club conformance prior to arriving on site for any championship.

Once on site, a player who is concerned about the conformity of grooves should alert a member of the USGA's Rules Committee as soon as practicable, as is the case with any question on the Rules of Golf or equipment. The first step will be to determine the make and model of the club in question and whether the club has been included in the USGA database of clubs. If the club is listed in the database, has not been altered, and there are no other extenuating circumstances or other evidence of non-conformance, the club will be assumed to conform.

If a club does not appear in the database or if the club has been altered, officials on site will have the ability to conduct a field test to determine conformance. The field test that the USGA has developed will take less than 10 minutes for a club and no more than 30 minutes for a set of clubs.

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What are the plans of other major golf organizations with respect to the new condition of competition?

The PGA Tour (including the Champions and Nationwide Tours), European PGA Tour and other members of the International Federation of PGA Tours, as well as the LPGA, intend to adopt this condition of competition at their tournaments beginning Jan. 1, 2010. The PGA of America and Augusta National Golf Club intend to adopt this

condition of competition at the PGA Championship and Masters Tournament, respectively, in 2010.

What has been the timeline in making the change?

Work on this subject has been ongoing at the USGA and R&A for many years. The following is an outline of key dates in the process, as well as future milestones:

<i>2005</i>	USGA and R&A announce they will be studying the effect of grooves.
<i>August 2006</i>	USGA publishes first of two major research reports on groove performance/characteristics. (Spin Generation I pdf)
<i>January 2007</i>	USGA publishes second major research report on groove performance/characteristics. (Spin Generation II pdf)
<i>February 2007</i>	USGA and R&A propose limits on groove volume and edge radius, seeking feedback from manufacturers.
<i>August 2008</i>	USGA and R&A adopt a revised proposal, incorporating manufacturer comments.
<i>January 1, 2010</i>	All new clubs submitted to USGA for approval must conform to new specifications. PGA Tour, major championships and international federation tours will adopt the rule as an “expert” condition of competition. Manufacturers are allowed to produce existing clubs and exhaust inventory until the end of 2010.
<i>2014</i>	USGA and R&A have announced they will implement condition of competition at expert amateur competitions. Other golf organizations (for example, state and regional associations) are expected to follow the USGA and R&A timeline for their expert competitions.
<i>2024</i>	Earliest date the condition of competition will become a permanent equipment specification in the Rules of Golf.

4-1/1 Condition Requiring Clubs Conforming with Groove and Punch Mark Specifications Effective January 1, 2010

A Committee that wishes to limit players to clubs manufactured with grooves and/or punch marks that conform to all aspects of the Rules of Golf that are effective from January 1, 2010 may adopt the condition of competition detailed below.

Between January 1, 2010 and January 1, 2014, it is recommended that this condition of competition be adopted only for competitions involving the highest level of expert player. After January 1, 2014, this condition of competition may be adopted more widely (e.g., at the highest level of amateur golf), but it is recommended only for competitions involving expert players.

"The player's clubs must conform to the groove and punch mark specifications in the Rules of Golf that are effective from January 1, 2010.

***PENALTY FOR CARRYING, BUT NOT MAKING STROKE WITH, CLUB OR CLUBS IN BREACH OF CONDITION:**

Match play - At the conclusion of the hole at which the breach is discovered, the state of the match is adjusted by deducting one hole for each hole at which a breach occurred; maximum deduction per round - Two holes.

Stroke play - Two strokes for each hole at which any breach occurred; maximum penalty per round - Four strokes.

Match or stroke play - In the event of a breach between the play of two holes, the penalty applies to the next hole.

Bogey and par competitions - See Note 1 to Rule 32-1a.

Stableford competitions - See Note 1 to Rule 32-1b.

*Any club or clubs carried in breach of this condition must be declared out of play by the player to his opponent in match play or his *marker* or a *fellow-competitor* in stroke play immediately upon discovery that a breach has occurred. If the player fails to do so, he is disqualified.

PENALTY FOR MAKING STROKE WITH CLUB IN BREACH OF CONDITION:
Disqualification.

Exception: Clubs manufactured before March 31, 1990 that meet the criteria of USGA Decision USGA/4-1/100, such as the Ping Eye 2 irons, will be permitted for play when the above Condition Requiring Clubs Conforming with Groove and Punch Mark Specifications Effective January 1, 2010 is in effect."