

## 2010 Groove Rule Change

The early weeks of the 2010 PGA Tour season have included considerable discussion about the new groove changes implemented by the USGA (and adopted by other governing bodies, including The PGA of America for its Championships). With that in mind, The PGA wants to ensure that its Professionals are prepared with answers to the questions about the changes that are likely to be coming from club members, customers and even fellow Professionals in regards to how they will be affected.

In a nutshell, the impact on PGA Professionals will vary depending upon who they teach, and in what events they play. Let's start with the two main points:

1. As you can see in the following Q and A prepared by the USGA, the vast majority of golfers will not be affected in the slightest. Whether they carry a USGA handicap or not, amateur golfers can continue to play with their current clubs until at least 2024, unless they intend to try to qualify for the U.S. Open, the U.S. Women's Open or the U.S. Senior Open. Furthermore, even if they did switch to the new conforming grooves, most would see little to no difference in shots from the fairway or the tee. The new groove rules are intended to reduce spin on shots from the rough, and it's likely that not many of the amateurs you come in contact with are spinning shots from the rough onto the green very often anyway.
2. How the new rules affect PGA Professionals who play in competitive events will depend upon what levels of competition you aspire to. The PGA has adopted the new rules as a condition of competition only for the PGA Championship, the Senior PGA Championship and the PGA Grand Slam of Golf, and has recommended their adoption for the 2010 Ryder Cup in Wales. For the foreseeable future, the condition of competition will not be in effect for any of the PGA Member Championships, including the PGA Professional and Senior PGA Professional National Championships, the PGA Winter Championships, the Tournament Series, Junior events and the Playing Ability Test.

Those two points certainly seem to narrow the scope of PGA Professionals who will be directly affected by the rules changes to the following: those who teach elite players who plan to play in events where the new rules are included as a condition of competition; and those who intend to play in those events. Let's look at those two categories first.

Of the former, Joe Hallett, PGA General Manager of the PGA Center for Golf Learning and Performance in Port St. Lucie, Fla., says that due to the rules change on Tour, PGA Professionals who work with elite players are studying changes to strategy, set makeup and swing techniques in order to "find repeatability and reliability" in how the ball reacts once it hits the green.

"Elite players need to know, when they make their swing, is the ball going to hit and spin back a few feet on the green, or is it going to release and run after impact," say Hallett. "Predictability is their goal, and the PGA Professionals working with them might be telling them, 'O.K., when we're coming out of the rough we're not going to fly it past the flag anymore, but rather hit a lower shot that lands short and releases.' The end result may call for a shallower swing plane, a less lofted club or some combination of both."

The main change – and ultimate intention of the new rules – may not be seen in the shots that players hit from the rough, but in the shots they hit before they end up in the rough. "Proper course management will be rewarded and the benefit of simply blasting the ball as far as possible and still being able to control the ball into the green will be marginalized, so teachers, caddies and players collectively are going to be rethinking strategy on many layouts," notes Hallett.

A prime example of the latter, a PGA Professional who will have to contend with the rules change for his own game, is reigning PGA Player of the Year Rick Schuller, a two-time PGA Championship participant who is preparing to play in a Nationwide Tour event this spring. Schuller says the changes should add "another degree of difficulty" to preparing for a professional tour event, but, at age 47, thinks players of his era might initially have an advantage in adjusting to the change because of their familiarity with the V grooves.

"I have many memories of having to read lies carefully before taking a swing, so I'm sure they will come back to me in short order," Schuller says, adding that his sponsor, TaylorMade, has provided him with a set of conforming irons to use in anticipation of playing in upcoming events where they are required (he expects the same will apply to all 20 PGA Professionals who qualify for the 2010 PGA Championship at Whistling Straits this August). Still, he echoes Hallett in noting that "you have to put the time in to know how the ball is going to react," and, with wedge shots in particular, "might have to change your trajectory in order to hold greens."

As noted earlier, all PGA Professionals are likely to be asked about the groove changes, and therefore the changes should be viewed as an opportunity to further enhance your position as an expert on all matters relating to the game and business of golf, including equipment issues. In this case, positioning yourself as an expert can also lead to some instant business, as Eric Hogge, PGA Director of Club Fitting at the PGA Center for Golf Learning and Performance, explains.

"The new groove rule has caused quite a stir and confusion for most players," notes Hogge. "The philosophy is to make shots from the rough more difficult to control for the elite player, but the question on the mind of the golf masses is, 'how this is going to effect play for our games at the local level?' The short answer is that it will not affect the average player and the weekend games played with friends. As a

club fitter, though, I'm using the opportunity when asked about the grooves to recommend that they change their grips about three times more often than they are currently."

## **11 Q and A for 2010 Groove Rule Change**

### **1. "How will the new rules affect me?"**

The answer depends on the golfer's skill level and participation in competitions.

For typical golfers:

- There will be little effect on their play or their clubs.
- They can continue to play their current clubs until at least 2024, which includes using these clubs for establishing or maintaining USGA handicaps.
- The new grooves will have little effect on shots from the fairway or off the tee. If you were able to spin a shot from the fairway with old grooves, you will be able to do it with new grooves as well.
- The new grooves primarily affect shots from the rough to the green by reducing spin. Most golfers don't hit greens from the rough very often.
- Clubs that conform to the old groove rules will continue to be produced by manufacturers until the end of 2010; retailers may continue to sell indefinitely any inventory that remains at the end of 2010. All models submitted to the USGA for conformance testing beginning in 2010 need to conform to the new rules regarding grooves.

For highly skilled golfers who may play, or aspire to play, in professional events:

- Beginning in 2010, 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, will require the use of clubs made to conform to the new rules regarding grooves. This is being done through the use of an optional condition of competition that was added to the USGA Rules book in 2010.
- The groove rules condition of competition will be applied by the USGA for all USGA Open events beginning in 2010: U.S. Open, U.S. Women's Open and U.S. Senior Open. Sectional qualifying events for these competitions will also use the condition of competition. In 2010 only, the condition of competition will not apply for the U.S. Open local qualifying stage. (There are no local qualifiers for U.S. Women's Open or the U.S. Senior Open.)

For PGA Professionals competing in PGA of America championships:

- The new rules regarding grooves will be adopted as a condition of competition for the 2010 Senior PGA Championship, 2010 PGA Championship, 2010 Grand Slam and be recommended for use at the 2010 Ryder Cup.
- The condition of competition will not be in effect at any of our PGA Member Championships i.e. PGA Professional National Championship, Senior PGA Professional National Championship, Assistant Championship, Winter Championships, Tournament Series, Playing Ability Test or any of our junior or amateur events.
- It should be noted that any player who qualifies for a PGA Tour, Nationwide Tour or Champions Tour event or who qualifies for the PGA or Senior PGA Championships, will be required to play under the condition of competition in those actual PGA Tour, Nationwide Tour or Champions Tour events as well as our PGA and Senior PGA Championships.
- The PGA of America National Board of Directors also recommends to our 41 PGA Sections that the condition of competition not be adopted at their events during the coming year. Each PGA Section however may make its own decision on such condition of competition for its own events.
- For PGA Sections that host PGA Tour, Nationwide Tour or Champions Tour qualifying events, these qualifying events will also adopt the condition of competition regarding grooves. However, for those that host pre-qualifying events for PGA Tour or Champions Tour events, the condition of competition will not be required to be in effect.

For highly skilled golfers who may play, or aspire to play, in USGA amateur championships:

- New grooves are not required for USGA amateur championships in 2010. In fact, the USGA is not scheduled to adopt the groove rules condition of competition for its amateur championships until 2014.

For those who play in championships conducted by state and regional golf associations:

- Implementing the condition of competition is a decision to be made by the Committees of these events.
- It is suggested that the state and regional golf organizations be contacted regarding their plans for adopting the condition of competition.

For those who play in local events, including club championships:

- Implementing the condition of competition is a decision to be made by the Committees of these events.
- It is suggested that the Committee in charge of these kinds of events be contacted regarding their plans for adopting the condition of competition.

**2. "I thought that the new rules regarding grooves only apply to wedges. Isn't that the case?"**

No. The new rules regarding grooves apply to all clubs except drivers and putters. There are two provisions in the new rules – smaller grooves (less volume) and rounder groove edges. All clubs with at least 25 degrees of loft (generally a 5-iron through the wedges) need to comply with both groove size and edge roundness specifications. Lower irons and fairway clubs only need to meet the smaller size requirement.

**3. "I read that some current clubs conform to the new rules. How can I find out if the clubs that I've been using conform to the new rules regarding grooves?"**

The USGA has published an informational database of clubs made prior to the new rules regarding grooves going into effect regarding their conformance to the new rules regarding grooves. It can be found on the USGA Web site at <http://www.usga.org/InfoClubsDB/intro.html>.

Most popular pre-2010 clubs are found on this database. However, should a particular club of interest not appear on the database, the manufacturer of the club should be contacted for this information. Additionally, the USGA can be contacted for further information.

**4. "What happens if I lose one of my clubs? Can I get it replaced with the same pre-2010 club?"**

**5. "What if the grooves on my favorite wedge wear out in a few years? Can I get that club replaced as well?"**

Yes, to both questions. If the manufacturer has a means of supplying replacements for older models with the same model, it will be treated as if it were manufactured at the same time as your current clubs. The exception – just like the rest of your clubs, if the condition of competition is in effect, any replacement club that does not meet the new rules regarding grooves would not be permitted for play in that competition.

**6. "Can I buy a used set in a few years and continue to use it?"**

Yes, until 2024. No matter how or when a club is acquired, it will be treated the same according to the Rules.

**7. "Why were the groove rules changed?"**

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.

One of the goals of the USGA is to maintain the challenge of the game. There is ample evidence demonstrating that the importance of driving accuracy has decreased significantly over the past three decades.

**8. "How are the new grooves different from the old grooves?"**

The basic answer is that the new grooves are smaller (volume reduced) and have edges that are not as sharp as the old grooves.

**9. "I read that the grooves need to be V-Grooves. Is that correct?"**

No. While the size of the grooves is reduced, they do not need to be V-shaped.

**10. "Can my old clubs be modified to comply with the new rules regarding grooves?"**

It is very unlikely that this is possible with old clubs. The new rules regarding grooves require the grooves to be smaller than the old grooves and generally this is not possible to accomplish without somehow filling in the old grooves and cutting new ones.

**11. "When should my club adopt the condition of competition requiring new grooves for our club championship?"**

All USGA national amateur championships are not scheduled to use the condition until 2014. Therefore, one recommendation is not to apply it prior to 2014 at the earliest. However, the decision is up to each club or competition committee based on its own situation. Like other conditions of competition in the Rulebook, there is no requirement that this condition be adopted at any time. For example, the one-ball condition of competition is optionally applied and has never been applied across the board at all competitions.