

How to Test Iron Club-Markings

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When a player buys a new set of iron clubs, he naturally assumes that the face markings conform with USGA specifications. Eight years ago the members of the National Association of Golf Club Manufacturers agreed to a USGA proposal that all clubs made on and after January 1, 1941 would comply with new rules which went into effect at the start of 1942.

However, some new clubs which players brought to this year's Open Championship did not conform until their grooves had been buffed down. In view of this experience, the Association has sent the following note to entrants in subsequent USGA 1948 Championships:

"Attention is called to the fact that markings on some iron clubs do not conform with USGA specifications. Unfortunately, this is true of a few new clubs made in recent years.

"We therefore enclose for your guidance a memorandum interpreting the specifications.

"Entrants are urged to see that their clubs conform before they arrive at a competition."

A player would be dead-stymied if he tried to check his clubs against the actual specifications, which deal with thousandths of an inch. But the USGA has prepared an explanatory memorandum to enable the layman-golfer to test his clubs. This is the memorandum which has been sent to entrants in the remaining Championships, and its main points follow:

The preamble to the Rules of Golf provides that the game is to be played with clubs and balls made in conformity with the Rules Governing Form and Make of Golf Clubs and Balls. It therefore becomes the duty of a committee in charge of a competition to enforce these regulations along with the playing rules, and one of the most difficult regulations to interpret regarding clubs is the detailed specifications covering the markings on iron clubs. These specifications are technical and difficult to understand and intended mainly for the guidance of club-makers. The following memorandum will serve as a guide for those charged with the responsibility of enforcing them.

1. Use a scale graduated in thirty-seconds of an inch and a small magnifying glass in testing clubs.

2. A club with grooves probably conforms with the specifications if (a) each groove is not wider than approximately one thirty-second of an inch and (b) the distance between grooves is not less than three times the width of the groove. Thus, one groove and the flat surface between the grooves should, when added together, measure approximately one-eighth of an inch.

3. A club with punch-marks meets the requirements if the markings do not exceed a slight amount over one-sixteenth of an inch in diameter. The maximum number of punch-marks permitted depends entirely on the diameter of the impression. The smaller the punch-mark the larger the number of impressions which are permitted.

4. There are further requirements covering the edges of grooves and punch-marks which can best be tested by rubbing the thumb across the face of the club. If the edges of the grooves appear to be sharp, it is likely the club is an old model or has been tampered with and it should be examined carefully.

Some manufacturers meet the requirements of the specifications without using the above described designs.

The manufacturing specifications are merely an interpretation of a general rule, in existence for some time, providing that "Club faces . . . shall not bear any lines, dots, or other markings with sharp or rough edges made for the obvious purpose of putting a cut on the ball."

The above general rule has not been changed. The specifications were adopted primarily to give manufacturers a definite guide as to the limits of that rule.

Players are warned against tampering with clubs by filing or roughening them or enlarging their markings. Clubs which do not meet the regulations can usually be corrected by a club-maker. The cooperation of all players will be appreciated.

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It seems too bad that it has been necessary to get down to such fine points in order to insure fair play. Wouldn't it be nice if, as in the old days, we could just go out and play golf?