

The Effect of Novel Clubs

By CHARLES B. GRACE

CHAIRMAN, USGA IMPLEMENTS AND BALL COMMITTEE

The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, Scotland, and this Association recently disapproved a wooden club of new design which has been produced under the trade name "Slipstream."

These clubs were designed to provide greater clubhead speed from the same amount of applied power. This was to be accomplished by directing small columns of free-flowing air through three passages running through the club-head from the face into a stream-lined egress chamber at the back, thus dissipating the partial vacuum behind the club-head produced by generated turbulence. The entrances to the passages in the face were outside the hitting area.

The decisions to disapprove this type of club were based simply on the fact that it represented a "substantial departure from the traditional and accepted form and make" and therefore did not conform to Rule 2-2a. However, the philosophy behind the decisions runs far deeper than might be apparent from that simple wording.

The "Slipstream" club, if approved, would open the door to all sorts of clubs having little or no relation to the basic standards of the game.

For one example, we could foresee it as paving the way to a clubhead which, for all practical purposes, would violate the spirit of that part of Rule 2-2b relating to the shape of the head which provides: "The head of a golf club shall be so constructed that its length from the back of the heel to the toe shall be greater than the breadth from the face to the back of the head."

The reduction of clubhead drag has substantially the same eventual effect as if mechanical propulsive equipment, such as springs, were incorporated in the club-head. The effect is to promote a greater

speed of the clubhead by means other than the player's skill. This idea is contrary to the spirit of the Rules.

Apparently the sole justification for the club is that it might produce increased distance. The same reasoning motivated some golf ball manufacturers in the past. That is why the USGA felt obliged to establish specifications of not only size and weight but also impact velocity for the golf ball. The Association invested a good many thousand dollars in the creation of a machine to test impact velocity of the ball. Had this not been done and had not the progressive lengthening of the ball thereby been arrested, the eventual result would have been to throw many golf courses out of balance architecturally, to make them "shorter" in playing qualities, to change the nature of the game of golf and to produce costly expense for altering and lengthening courses, with attendant cost increases for maintenance and taxes.

The USGA exists for the sole purpose of serving the welfare of all golfers, including the average golfer. That is precisely why the Association (which is an organization of Clubs) has fixed standards for implements and the ball and for the Rules of play and has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in USGA Green Section work designed to produce better golf-course maintenance at lower cost. Through standard specifications, the Association has sought indirectly to bring about improved quality and better value in implements and the ball, rather than merely a continual increase in distance.

The measure of the Executive Committee's decisions is what is considered best for the game, in the long run. The Committee is convinced that, while admitting improvements within the spirit of the Rules, a charm of golf is found in its challenge to improve skill.