

# INVENTIVE MINDS FIND GOLF IS FERTILE FIELD

By

P. J. BOATWRIGHT, JR.  
USGA Assistant Director

From time to time the USGA's Implements and Ball Committee is called upon to render rulings as to whether or not clubs with "new" features conform with Rule 2-2 of the Rules of Golf.

This is one of the Association's most important functions. If there were no Rules regulating the club and the ball, it is probable that inventors and manufacturers would produce clubs featuring all sorts of mechanical contrivances and "super" golf balls for the purpose of making golf easier. The game as we now know it would be profoundly changed.

Several interesting decisions regarding clubs have recently been issued by the Implements and Ball Committee.

## Wrench Was Furnished

One case concerned a putter whose length of shaft and lie could be adjusted with a small wrench furnished to purchasers of the club. The manufacturer was aware that the club violated Rule

2-2b, which provides: "No part of the club may be movable or separable or capable of adjustment during a round of play," but he asked for approval on the basis that purchasers could render the club incapable of adjustment after it had been adjusted to suit each individual's game. The USGA advised the manufacturer that it could not approve a club which was capable of adjustment after purchase.

## Adhesive Strips Out

Another manufacturer requested a ruling on plastic strips  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches long and  $\frac{5}{8}$  of an inch wide designed for attachment to the face of a putter by means of a pressure sensitive adhesive. The manufacturer said that the plastic strips provide "a built-in cushioning effect that will force you to finesse the stroke." It was ruled that application of such material to a putter-face would violate Rule 2-2b as well as Rule 2-2a, which provides:



This is a sampling of implements submitted to the USGA Implements and Ball Committee for rulings.

"The golf club shall be composed of a shaft and a head, and all of the various parts shall be fixed so that the club is one unit."

The basis for this decision was the fact that this plastic material, according to the manufacturer, could readily be removed by prying it loose with a sharp-edged instrument.

In an earlier decision involving the use of lead tape, it was held that the attachment of lead tape to a clubhead violates the Rules unless it is applied in such a way as to seem to be an integral part of the club; it was suggested that this could be accomplished by some such method as buffing the edges of the lead tape into the metal on the back of the club.

### **Not Properly Aligned**

Another ruling got into very fine points but illustrated the fact that limits must be placed on certain features of clubs. This case had to do with a wood club produced by a leading manufacturer. The heel of this club curved outward to such an extent that it was immediately apparent that the shaft and the neck or socket did not remain in line with the back of the heel as required by Rule 2-2e. Further, the club appeared not to conform to an interpretation of Rule 2-2e which restricts to  $\frac{5}{8}$  (or 40/64) inch the distance from the axis of the shaft to the back of the heel of a wood club.

Two sets of these clubs were tested on a USGA device designed to measure the distance from the axis of the shaft to the back of the heel. This dimension on the driver of one set was 47/64 inch; the dimension on the driver of the other set was 45/64 inch.

### **Heel is Sanded**

Upon being notified that the club did not conform to the specifications, the manufacturer modified the club by sanding the heel down, and the club now conforms.

You might ask how the use of clubs and attachments such as these could make the game easier. In the case of the wood club, if the Rules did not restrict the distance from the axis of the shaft

to the back of the heel, it would be possible to locate the shaft of a wood club equidistant between the heel and the toe—directly above the "sweet spot." A club of this design would probably produce less torque and therefore more distance; both these factors would tend to make the game easier.

### **Would Reduce Skill**

Elimination of the Rules prohibiting adjustable clubs would also conduce to making the game easier as some clubs then would probably be designed to provide—through adjustment—an implement ideally suited for every conceivable type of shot. Thus, the need for punch shots and three-quarter shots, which require a special skill, would be eliminated.

The reason for prohibiting use of the plastic strips described above is essentially the same as that given in the case of the adjustable club. In the words of the manufacturer, this plastic material provides "a built-in cushioning effect." If permitted, it is quite possible that a player could begin a round with a plastic strip attached and find that the "cushioning effect" was not suited to the putting greens of the particular course on which he was playing, in which case it would be a simple matter for him to remove the plastic. This, in effect, would be tantamount to his having two putters in his bag.

### **Must Follow Tradition**

The second paragraph of Rule 2-2a provides: "The club shall not be substantially different from the traditional and customary form and make."

In a nutshell, this pretty well describes the principle behind all the Rules regulating clubs—that it is desirable that the game remain essentially as it is today.

Players in doubt as to the legality of clubs are advised to consult the USGA.

If a manufacturer is in doubt as to the legality of a club he proposes to manufacture, he should submit a sample to the USGA for a ruling, such sample to become the property of the USGA for reference purposes.