

HOW GROOVY

USGA's new wedge groove ruling could affect your short game

By Russ Ryden, AGCP Master Fitter, President, Fit2Score

ON JANUARY 1 THE USGA RULES for wedge grooves will change. According to the USGA, “the objective of this change is to limit the effectiveness of grooves on shots from the rough to the effect of the traditional V-groove design.”

A summary of the timetable for the new grooves is as follows:

1. Every iron and wedge made and sold before Jan. 1, 2010 will be conforming until Jan. 1, 2024.
2. All clubs used in USGA Open events must conform to the new standard on Jan. 1, 2010.
3. All clubs used in USGA Amateur events will have to conform on Jan. 1, 2014.
4. All new clubheads introduced and sold after Jan. 1, 2010 will have to conform.

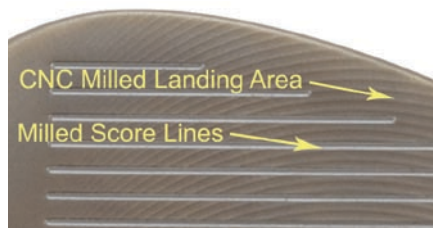
The bottom line – on Jan. 1, 2010, most new clubs will conform to the new groove rule.

MODERN WEDGE FACE TECHNOLOGY

When loft is over 40 degrees, the ball is not compressed like it is at lower lofts. Without friction created from face texture, the ball loses spin rpms.

If your ball is in the rough, the deep grass will reduce the friction between the surface of the clubface and the ball. Friction will have to come from the top edge of the groove cutting through the grass and contacting the ball. The USGA is attempting to reward accuracy by making it more difficult to get a wedge shot from the rough spinning and holding a green.

Here is a look at the face of a modern wedge. The landing area (the space between



the grooves) is CNC milled. The technique is not new, as it has been around since the early '80s. The depth of these micro grooves is regulated much like sand blasted faces.

Score lines can be cast, stamped or cut (milled). Manufacturers of premium wedges mill the score lines so that they provide a consistent and potentially sharp edge. That's what puts spin on a golf ball.

A custom-fitter finds the combination of wedge shaft and head that works for your short game style. That may include custom grinding the wedge sole and fitting with one of the new wedge-specific shafts now available.

WEDGE WEAR

If you do not clean your clubface between every shot, your wedge grooves wear out.

These pictures were taken with a 200x digital microscope.



The upper edge of the grooves of this wedge are rounded and damaged. You don't need a digital microscope to tell if your wedges still have edges. If they look worn, the edges are gone. If your wedges look like the photo above, you should not be very concerned about the new groove edge rules.

Below is a photo of a new Wishon Technology CNC milled Micro-Groove score line:



The combination of machined landing areas and score lines creates wedges that deliver predictable and consistent spin on all shots. Thus, chips to a close pin will check up. A skilled player uses this technology to score, which is why some Tour pros are reported to be changing wedge heads weekly to guarantee consistency.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

Given that the PGA Tour voted on June 30th to adopt this USGA rule, look for many manufacturers to work overtime to have their new designs ready by the Jan. 1 deadline.

Wedge shaft design can add back about half of the spin that will be lost when the rough is not a factor. The next generation of balls could put back the rest of the spin on clean shots.

Inevitably, the USGA may get what they want – a penalty for long drives into the rough and rewards for shots from the fairway.

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