

Can't Golf Without Me!

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Can you ever imagine yourself playing a round of golf using balls made of wood?

Well that's the way it was before the invention of the 'featherie' or 'feathery' golf ball in the early 17th century. This version of the golf ball consisted of a hand sewn leather pouch stuffed with boiled chicken or goose feathers. As the pouch cooled the stitched closed, the feathers would expand and the hide would shrink resulting in a compact spherical object that was then coated with paint.

The 'featherie' remained the standard ball for more than two centuries. Each maker would produce two 'featherie' balls per day at a cost of approximately \$20 (CAN). It's no wonder the early era of this sport was for the elite and wealthy only.

Any golfer knows how easy it is to lose a golf ball. Today's estimates show that 300 million golf balls are lost or discarded in the United States every year. There are no numbers for world estimates, but you can bet it's a lot since there are so many countries in which golf is being played. I think double the 300 million, would be a conservative estimate.

Where have all those golf balls gone? On the course or in water hazards is where most stray golf balls end up.

The downside of a lost golf ball is that it is estimated to require 100 to 1000 years to decompose naturally. This is according to simulations done by research teams at the Danish Golf Union. It had to be simulations because the golf balls of today haven't been around 100 years.

Now just imagine the inventor of the 'featherie' meeting with a golf ball manufacturer today and ordering 540 million golf balls? This is how many golf balls are estimated to be sold yearly in the United States alone. Now, that's a lot of feathers!

All that changed in 1848 when the gutta-percha ball was created from dried sap of a Sapodilla tree. What is important about this invention is that it allowed an accidental discovery. During games the ball would become nicked and scraped and these defects actually improved the gutta-percha ball's sustained flight when compared to an untainted sphere. It simply travelled farther down the fairway. Therefore, makers began denting the surface of a new ball by hammering it into an evenly dimpled round shape which would provide the same results as used ones.

In 1899, Coburn Haskell of Cleveland, Ohio, received a patent for a golf ball. How easy was it to create the modern version of the golf ball?

Well, the story is that Coburn Haskell had driven to nearby Akron, Ohio, to keep a golf date with Bertram G. Work, then superintendent of B.F. Goodrich. While at the plant waiting for Mr. Work, Haskell casually wound a long rubber thread into a ball. When he bounced the ball it flew almost to the ceiling. Work then suggested Haskell put a cover on the creation.

Haskell's and Work's golf ball was manufactured by the Haskell Golf Ball Co. making Haskell a very wealthy man.

Golf balls by today's standards are vastly different from their original manufacturing. They come in a two, three, or four-layer design, known as a two-piece, three-piece, or four-piece ball. Three-piece balls typically have a softer polyurethane or Surlyn cover and a mantle layer of rubber windings around a rubber core. Four-piece balls additionally have an inner cover made of a blend of ionomers and an outer cover made of Elastomer or Balata. One piece balls made of solid Surlyn are rarely used to play golf, but are used on practice grounds and driving ranges.

Two-piece balls maximize distance and minimize spin. They are good for novice golfers and high handicappers with slow swing speeds or intermediate golfers just looking for more distance and less side spin. They are also known as distance balls or low-spin balls.

Three-piece balls create low spin off a driver to provide distance, yet provide more spin off iron shots. They are ideal for intermediate golfers looking for a softer feel, who have no problem with distance and can make an efficient use of backspin.

Four-piece balls are generally recommended for expert players with faster swings, who never slice or hook and have a perfect control of backspin. Four-piece balls produce high spin off wedges and short irons for maximum stopping power, while offering a soft feel and exceptional control around the green.

When it comes to dimension, the United States Golf Association specifies that a golf ball must weigh no more than 1.620 ounces (45.93g), be spherical in shape and be no less than 1.68-inches (42.7mm) in diameter. This is called 'The American Ball'. The 'British Ball' is a teensy bit smaller, at 1.62-inches (41.1mm) and performs within specified velocity, distance, and symmetry limits.

When a golf ball is hit, the impact, which lasts less than a millisecond, determines the ball's velocity, launch angle and spin rate, all of which influence its trajectory and its behavior when it hits the ground.

The curved path of a golf ball known as slice or hook is due largely to the ball's spinning motion and the Magnus effect, causing a horizontal force that moves the ball from a straight-line in its trajectory.

Back to the dimples on a golf ball; if the flight of the ball is straight it's all good but if the ball hooks or slices the dimples actually intensify the Magnus and back spin effects. ? Oh, darn.

Dimples are believed to add about 115% to the distance by reducing the amount of drag on the ball and accentuating the effects of lift.

Dimples on a regulation golf ball differ greatly from one golf ball to another, depending on their depth, alignment and distribution. Each dimple pattern has a different impact on the ball's performance. Manufacturers are constantly seeking to improve them. In order to include more dimple coverage, some patterns require the use of dimples of different sizes arranged in a structured, symmetric way on the same ball.

The number of dimples and nodes (dimple sizes) is not arbitrary. The optimum dimple number has been defined at about 350 to 450 per ball, but the number of dimples can vary from 252 to 500 dimples per ball.

Whatever the type of golf ball you choose, stick to your choice for a while to get used to the new golf balls and develop some consistency in your play.

ANOTHER SMILE MOMENT: You know you're in need of some practice when your divot flies farther than your ball!

To book your next golf lesson, contact Lisa today via e-mail at lisal golfpro@gmail.com or by telephone at 506-232-0728 or visit her website at www.PrivateGolfPro.ca .

Lisa Elle is the PrivateGolfPro who teaches in the greater Moncton area and southeast NB. Her unique golf service assists all levels of players with their golf swing. Her golf articles have been published in print and on websites across Canada. She is also the face of the charitable trust 'Lisa's Fund - a breath for Cystic Fibrosis'.