

# Long-Flying Ball is Weighty Issue

For at least the past 100 years, the cry from many quarters has been that the ball is going too far. This, of course, is true but complex to analyze. The players today are bigger, stronger and better trained than a generation ago. The fairways that were once cut to three-quarters of an inch are now cut to one-fourth inch in some national events adding to the distance the ball travels.

The equipment is not only better but also more consistent. In Bobby Jones' day you were lucky to find six or seven round balls in a dozen. (Hogan would hit practice shots with balls before rounds to determine the best performing ones.)

All these factors plus the improved ball construction and dimple design (aerodynamics) have increased distance remarkably in the past 20 years and explosively in the past three years.

How do we stop the coming, routine 400-yard tour drive? Not by limiting the equipment (as some—usually the ball makers—would argue) but by limiting the golf ball. After all, while it is not the ball's fault, it is the ball that is going too far. Physics and the USGA's recent length and COR limits plus the proposed MOI limit will take care of the equipment "problem."

How do we do this? Very simply, we change the weight of the ball from the present 1.62 oz. to somewhere in the 1.45 oz. to 1.50 oz. range. There is an "ideal" weight which would not be too great of a change, and yet accomplish a modest but meaningful distance reduction for the present tour player without much effect on the average player. The exact weight could only be determined by much testing at various skill levels.

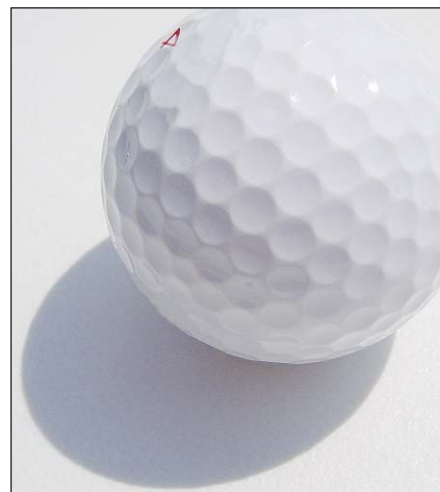
Believe it or not, this concept was tried in 1931 with a 1.55 oz. ball. The

idea was not given a good fair trial and was rescinded after just one year. That's too bad, as it would have been a good move and, perhaps, slowed the distance race at that time.

Let us look at what happens when you play a lighter ball. First, for the long hitters, the ball would "balloon" and "wander" more, requiring increased skill to keep the ball down and keep it straight. The loss of distance for the tour player would be about 12-20 yards. However, the tour players would not likely swing as hard, desiring control, so overall distance would drop even more. The shotmakers would make a comeback!

For the average golfer, there may be a loss of five yards on perfectly hit shots, but in most cases there would be no noticeable difference for the average player because he does not hit the ball squarely that often. On the other hand, with a lighter ball, the average golfer would be able to hit a lower lofted club from the fairway as well as get his irons airborne more easily. In addition, the lighter ball would stop more quickly on the greens—also leaving smaller ball-marks.

Several years ago, I was testing various light weight balls, and played a round with Raymond Floyd and his two sons at Seminole Golf Club. On the 4th tee, all three Floyds hit good drives, so I asked them to hit my test balls. These were 1.50 oz. samples (remember, the Rules have an upper weight limit of 1.62 but no lower limit). After all three hit the test balls, and hit them well, we discovered they were 8-15 yards shorter than their first drives. (And this was before the additional distances we have seen in the last few years.)



They all thought the change was acceptable and could live with the results.

More research needs to be done on the effects of golf ball weight, but it's clear that this is a relatively simple solution to the problem of the best courses becoming irrelevant. This change will bring skill back to the highest levels of competition, negating some of the advantages gained by the monster hitters.

I believe the USGA should be conducting group testing involving various skill level players and gathering input to study with various weight golf balls, even if no action is eventually taken. At least the USGA would be able to say they are gathering input and are concerned about the distance phenomenon.

*(John Staver, from Virginia, Minnesota, has been a club builder for more than 40 years and a Rules expert, serving as a USGA official for more than 20 years. A member of the Minnesota Golf Hall of Fame, he's a Joe Dey Award Winner, presented by the USGA for contributions to the game.) ■*