



12 May 2025

Area of Interest - Update

Identification Markings for Golf Balls

On 16 December 2024, R&A Rules Limited (The R&A) and the United States Golf Association (the USGA) published an Area of Interest (Aoi) communication seeking feedback from stakeholders on the use of a marking on the golf ball to readily identify conformance to the 2028 Overall Distance Standard (ODS) test conditions. The key objective of such a marking is to provide clarity for golfers, committees, PGA professionals, retailers and other stakeholders so they can easily identify that a ball conforms to the 2028 ODS test conditions.

In response to feedback received regarding the December 2024 Aoi, we are no longer pursuing 'Option 1' (Specified 2028 Conforming Identification Marking). In addition, we would like to provide clarification on 'Option 2' (Specified 2028 Conforming Identification Marking with Manufacturer Flexibility) in this update.

Also, based on manufacturer feedback, The R&A and the USGA have identified an opportunity to undertake a related review of the requirements regarding identification markings on balls in general, which are currently set out in the Golf Ball Submission Guidelines published by The R&A and the USGA respectively. The objective of this review is to consider whether complete flexibility can be provided to manufacturers in the application of markings, while also ensuring that it is straightforward to identify a golf ball as conforming to the 2028 ODS test conditions.

The USGA and The R&A would welcome additional feedback regarding the clarification and the alternative approach for golf ball markings which would replace the requirements as currently stipulated in the Golf Ball Submission Guidelines.

Please find detail regarding the clarification and alternative approach below:

Clarification of the Specified 2028 Conforming Identification Marking with Manufacturer Flexibility (Option 2 of the December 2024 Aoi)

This option requires that any golf ball listed as conforming to the 2028 ODS would incorporate a distinguishing characteristic prescribed by The R&A and USGA. Manufacturers would have the flexibility to incorporate the prescribed distinguishing characteristic within their own designs subject to the approval of The R&A and/or USGA.

The prescribed marking would likely require the incorporation of a reference to the new test, for example "2028". Manufacturers would have freedom to either add the text to their golf ball as a standalone marking or to incorporate this text within a marking designed by the manufacturer. However, there would be a requirement for the unique identifier to be identifiable and readable by the naked eye.

The manufacturer's decision of how to add this text as a marking would be pre-approved by the USGA and/or The R&A in advance of submitting the ball for conformance testing. While the approved marking should result in an easy means of identification of conformance simply by looking at the ball, The R&A and USGA would also publish a list of approved markings associated with all manufacturers for assistance with identification. Additionally, the List of Conforming Golf Balls would continue to be maintained in its current form.

Alternative Approach: The Use of a Unique Code or Similar as the Sole Identifying Mark for a Golf Ball

The R&A and the USGA are exploring replacing the current golf ball marking requirements with a sole requirement to use an alpha-numeric code, or similar unique identifier. This marking would be unique to a model of golf ball and would become the sole identifying mark for the model for the purpose of inclusion in the List of Conforming Golf Balls.

If such a proposal were adopted, golf ball manufacturers would have complete flexibility around all other golf ball markings. The R&A and USGA would not specify the size and location of the unique identifier, and it could be incorporated with other markings at the discretion of the manufacturer, so long as the unique identifier were identifiable and readable by the naked eye.

This option could significantly simplify the requirements for golf ball markings conforming to the 2028 ODS test conditions, while otherwise providing complete flexibility to golf ball manufacturers regarding all other markings. As the unique identifier would be the sole identifying mark for golf balls of identical model, multiple balls of the same model and marked with the same identifier could, in principle, have different markings. However, golf balls with different coloured covers would continue to be considered as separate models.

As one example, a unique identifier could take the form of a simple alphanumeric code associated with the manufacturer, year of launch of the golf ball and a three-digit number to identify the ball model, printed on the golf ball. For example, XXX-28-336 – where 28 refers to the year of release or original submission, XXX is a three-letter identifier unique to the manufacturer and 336 is associated with the specific model of the ball. While the manufacturer code would remain constant, the release or submission year would differ, and the 3-digit identifier related to a specific model could be chosen at the discretion of the manufacturer. We, of course, welcome suggestions for other formats for unique identifiers that would serve the purposes identified in this Aol.

We invite comments in response to the options noted above and ask that all responses to this Area of Interest be received no later than 11 June 2025. These communications should be addressed to Dr Mark Grattan at The R&A via the email address equipmentstandards@randa.org.