Exception 1 to Rule 14-3 gives Bionic a helping hand

by Mel Cheskin

Golf seems to be the one sport that makes a habit of creating market demand from the grass roots up. Almost all sports innovation appears to be created for and tested by the pros or a sport's elite performers. Having first established its Classic Bionic golf glove in response to the demands of the ordinary golfer, Hillerich & Bradsby (H&B) has now produced a glove that the pros will definitely want to use. After all, even the pro golfer wants to drive the ball further without sacrificing accuracy; that's a given. And, while most might believe a high-priced driver is the best piece of equipment to help obtain extra distance, Bionic Gloves are proving there is another way.

In the past few years, club golfers might have been loathe to admit that their improved performance was down to the glove they were wearing; now it seems that they can claim to have been ahead of the pros. H&B has finally been given United States Golf Association (USGA) approval for its Bionic Pro glove. The USGA is the game's governing body for the US and Mexico (the R&A, based in St. Andrews, Scotland, is the governing body in over 120 countries and the two organisations meet every four years to agree any rule amendments) and decides on what is permissible. It wasn't sure about the Bionic glove and its maker has been the subject of much controversy over the years, following accusations from the USGA and others that its gloves offer golfers an unfair advantage. Now there is nothing to prevent professional golfers using the gloves during PGA tournaments.



Bionic Gloves

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As the fastest growing glove firm in the industry, Bionic had battled unsuccessfully with the USGA in the past to have its padded, anatomically designed gloves approved for USGA tournament play. In December 2007, H&B was finally sanctioned by the USGA to provide both its Sliver Series and Classic Bionic gloves for USGA tournament play as an 'Exception 1 to Rule 14-3 – Equipment permitted conditionally for Medical Reasons'. The objection from the USGA equipment committee had consistently been that the Classic Bionic glove offered a playing advantage. This was reinforced by advertising and data from the company showing improved driving distance and control using the original Classic Bionic glove.

In an independent study carried out by the renowned Pinehust Golf Academy, the Bionic Classic glove helped most mid-to-high handicap golfers gain an average of six to seven yards of carry distance off the tee while maintaining accuracy. The report concluded that: "The Bionic Classic glove consistently enhanced carry distance" compared with drives hit using another leading brand of glove, and for those wearing no glove at all. Obviously, the rules committee at the USGA felt this was enough of an advantage to ban the glove from USGA tour play. Another pilot study for Bionic has shown that a standard glove helps increase golfer's hand strength by 3%, while the Classic Bionic golf glove increases relative hand strength by nearly 8%, two-and-a-half times more than the standard glove.

Anatomical design

So, what makes the Bionic Glove different from all the others? The difference is found in the design which is based on the anatomy of the hand and the science of ergonomics. In regular gloves, high points of the bone rub against the shaft of the club and can cause blisters, calluses and hand fatigue. As the first golf glove designed by an orthopaedic hand surgeon, Dr Jim Keinert, Bionic is the only golf glove designed with padding strategically placed on the palm and fingers to even out the hand's natural peaks and valleys. This creates more surface contact for a better, more relaxed and lighter grip, which has been proven to enhance performance. The pad system, made from a layered leather, terry cloth and rubber combination, gives golfers a light, yet snug, grip to help prevent the clubface from twisting at the point of impact.

Unlike conventional gloves, which are designed with a straight cut in the fingers, Bionic gloves feature a pre-rotated design that follows the natural motion of the fingers. Bionic designs its fingers to work with the natural closure of the hand. This means that the seams on the index finger and fifth finger rotate inwards toward the centre of the hand, allowing a better grip on an object in the palm of the hand.



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Bionic Gloves

"A golfer's hands get tired on the back nine," according to Paul Azinger, a 15-time professional tour champion. The Bionic glove design offers golfers the light grip that every golf coach strives to instil in better players. The light grip Bionic also helps to reduce hand fatigue.

Professional standard

With endorsements from the US Arthritis Foundation, as well as the senior and amateur golf associations, and mass acceptance in the marketplace, H&B felt it was time to respond to the demand from top golfers to produce a glove that would be popular on the PGA and WPGA circuits. In development for nearly two years, the new Bionic Pro glove is made from special, micro-thin cabretta leather to offer low handicappers the fit, feel and flexibility they demand with amazing durability. Bionic's patented technology gives golfers a relaxed grip for increased club head speed and precise club control. The primary predictors for increased distance in addition to club head speed were also the angle of attack and horizontal impact (where the ball hits horizontally on the club face).

A hand contains 14 phalanx bones and a large number of tendons and muscles. Combined,

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Hillerich & Bradsby's Bionic Pro glove has finally received United States Golf Association approval. It is said to offer excellent flexibility and dexterity as well as being highly breathable.

Bionic Gloves

they allow for an intricate range of motion and dexterity. Made from stretchable Dynamic Lycra, motion zones are added in the glove over the knuckles and web zones are added between the fingers for greater flexibility and natural dexterity. Dynamic Lycra mesh flexion zones on both sides create dual air flow to make Bionic Pro one of the most breathable gloves in golf. Porous fibres help perspiration escape while special hybrid oil ensures tackiness in dry or wet weather conditions.

Bionic believes the glove-only endorsement it has received from Mr Azinger, captain of the 2008 US Ryder Cup, is a first for the golf industry. Bionic has not only changed golf glove technology by making the glove an essential piece of equipment; it has also changed the way golf glove endorsement deals work.

Most brands emphasise the quality of the leather used in the product and offer breathable materials and performance fabrics that enhance fit and increase heat and moisture dissipation. However, Bionic gloves have pushed the industry to rethink golf glove design. Although there are many brands on the market using synthetic materials, all the top-quality golf gloves are made mainly from cabretta leather. The other large selling golf gloves on the market are produced either by equipment makers such as TaylorMade, Callaway and Titleist or by essentially shoemakers such as FootJoy and Nike. However, another glove-only brand following Bionic's success is Terris Golf, based in New York State. Designed by certified hand therapist Rita Terris, its competition golf gloves, with an Akton visco-elastic polymer pad system, were recently sanctioned by the USGA equipment committee under Exception 1 to Rule 14-3.

How long before more brands rethink their glove constructions?

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