

History of Golf Balls: The Guts

Golf is a sport with a long and proud tradition, and not much has changed over the course of history. Though the clubs, the fashions and even the rules have evolved over time, the humble golf ball has undergone the most drastic changes.

When golf was first introduced, athletes used a ball called a "featherie". The "ball" was actually a leather pouch that was stuffed with feathers. The feathers would be wet, and the leather was soaked as well. This stuffed pouch was stitched inside out, soaked in oil and dried. When dry, the ball was painted white and used on the golf course. While it served its purpose on sunny days, this ball would become useless as soon as it got wet.

The gutta-percha was the next important phase in the history of golf balls. To make this type of ball, the craftsman would take gum from the Malaysian sapodilla tree, heat the gum, and mold it into a smooth, round shape. Surprisingly, the gutta-percha ball did not reach the mere 150-175 yards that its predecessor the featherie did. Needless to say, this type of golf ball needed improvements. A professor realized the problem, and created markings on the ball. These markings made a noticeable improvement, and gave the golf ball the signature "dimples" that it still sports to this day.

Over the years, different people have experimented with the best types of outer surfaces, but it's been found that the dimples are still the most efficient. The oddity of the golf ball is not merely skin deep. The very core of a golf ball consists of a small rubber ball, wrapped countless times over with rubber thread. The wrapped ball is then coated with enameling, and the enamel is dimpled to create the unique finish.

Next time you're on the links, give a little thought to the humble golf ball. Years of trial and tribulation have made up the history of golf balls, and have contributed to the little white wonder that brings so much joy to so many golfers.