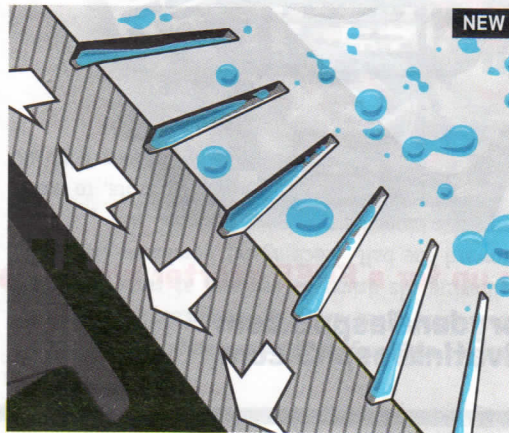
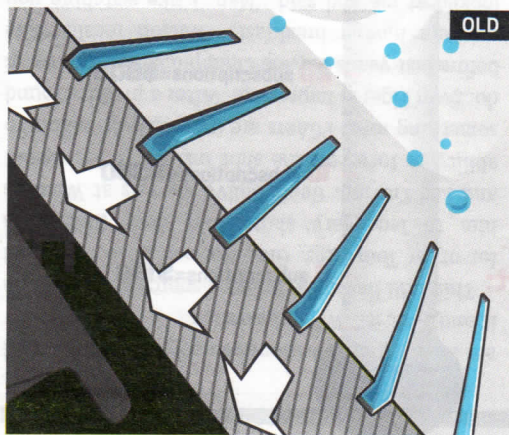


A FRESH CUT

THIS SEASON, the PGA Tour is hoping to stop the trendy practice that has come to be known as bomb and gouge, a tactic used by many big hitters, including Watson, that takes advantage of club technology. "Bomb" the driver with little regard for keeping the ball in the fairway, then "gouge" it out of the rough with an iron, using the sharp grooves on the clubface to spin the ball onto the green. "Players today don't have any fear of being erratic off the tee," says USGA senior technical boss Dick Rugge.

Blame Ping. Since the mid-1980s, when company founder Karsten Solheim began cutting wider depressions into clubfaces, most pros have favored irons with square "U-grooves" (below left): channels cut into the clubface at 90° angles that not only direct dirt, grass and moisture away from the ball at impact, but also—due to their sharpness—generate sufficient traction to ensure that a ball leaves the club with enough backspin to sit on the green like an obedient dog.

Now, thanks to a rule change first announced in August 2008, the irons 5 through 9 must have grooves spaced more closely together, with slightly rounder edges (below right). The change should make it tougher to control approach shots out of the rough. How players will compensate remains to be seen. But Rugge has one answer: "Golfers will have less certainty of where shots will end up on the green, but they could avoid the problem by staying in the fairway." —CHARLES CURTIS



they'd let us use a cart," he says.

A fast talker who often loses his train of thought, Watson has been told that he might have attention deficit disorder; he doesn't disagree. "I've never been told I have it by a doctor," he says, smiling. "But I'm not making an appointment anytime soon." Says Angie: "If not being able to sit still all day wanting to do a million things a day means you have ADD, then Bubba and I both have it."

The couple met at Georgia over a game of around the world—although Bubba never got to shoot. Angie drained 10 straight—and hit it off immediately. So much so that on their first date, Angie informed Bubba that she would not be able to have children. The couple is now working on adoption plans. "Kids just adore Bubba," she says. "They can see he's one of them at heart. I think that's one reason a lot of fans are pulling for him."

She may have a point. These days, especially on golf, it's hard not to root for a guy who lets himself be seen, who just wants to grip it and rip it.

"I want to win," Bubba says. "But I want to do my way. And when it happens, I don't want to have to thank my staff of coaches and assistants and psychologists. I want to thank my sponsors and my wife, then hold up that trophy knowing it was me. Thank you."

You're welcome.

Our writer loves to talk golf with fans.
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