USGA Media Center

LIBERTY CORNER, N.J., and ST. ANDREWS, Scotland, March 12, 2018 /PRNewswire/ -- The USGA and The R&A have unveiled the new Rules of Golf, to be implemented January 1, 2019.

The USGA and The R&A finalized golf's new Rules this month after an extensive review that included a request for feedback from the global golf community on the proposed changes. Golfers can now access the official 2019 Rules of Golf by visiting RandA.org or usga.org/rules.

The process to modernize the Rules began in 2012 and was initiated to ensure that the Rules are easier to understand and apply for all golfers and to make the game more attractive and accessible for newcomers.

While the majority of proposed Rules remain intact in the final version, several important changes to the initial proposals and further clarification of many Rules were incorporated. The most significant adjustments made following review of the feedback received from golfers around the world include:

- Dropping procedure: When taking relief (from an abnormal course condition or penalty area, for example), golfers will now drop from knee height. This will ensure consistency and simplicity in the dropping process while also preserving the randomness of the drop. *(Key change: the proposed Rules released in 2017 suggested dropping from any height).*

- Measuring in taking relief: The golfer's relief area will be measured by using the longest club in his/her bag (other than a putter) to measure one club-length or two club-lengths, depending on the situation, providing a consistent process for golfers to establish his/her relief area. *(Key change: the proposed Rules released in 2017 suggested a 20-inch or 80-inch standard measurement).*

- Removing the penalty for a double hit: The penalty stroke for accidentally striking the ball more than once in the course of a stroke has been removed. Golfers will simply count the one stroke they made to strike the ball. *(Key change: the proposed Rules released in 2017 retained the existing one-stroke penalty).*

- Balls Lost or Out of Bounds: Alternative to Stroke and Distance: A new Local Rule will now be available in January 2019, permitting committees to allow golfers the option to drop the ball in the vicinity of where the ball is lost or out of bounds (including the nearest fairway area), under a two-stroke penalty. It addresses concerns raised at the club level about the negative impact on pace of play when a player is required to go back under stroke and distance. The Local Rule is not intended for higher levels of play, such as professional or elite level competitions. *(Key change: this is a new addition to support pace of play)*

"We're thankful for the golfers, administrators and everyone in the game who took the time to provide us with great insight and thoughtful feedback," said Thomas Pagel, USGA Senior Director of Rules & Amateur Status. "We couldn't be more excited to introduce the new Rules ahead of the education process and their implementation."

David Rickman, Executive Director – Governance at The R&A, said, "We are pleased to be introducing the new Rules of Golf after a collaborative and wide-ranging review process which has embraced the views of golfers, Rules experts and administrators worldwide. We believe that the new Rules are more in tune with what golfers would like and are easier to understand and apply for everyone who enjoys playing this great game."

Major proposals introduced in 2017 that have been incorporated into the modernized Rules include:

- Elimination or reduction of "ball moved" penalties: There will be no penalty for accidentally moving a ball on the putting green or in searching for a ball; and a player will not be responsible for causing a ball to move unless it is "virtually certain" that he or she did so.

- Relaxed putting green rules: There will be no penalty if a ball played from the putting green hits an unattended

flagstick in the hole; players may putt without having the flagstick attended or removed. Players may repair spike marks and other damage made by shoes, animal damage and other damage on the putting green and there is no penalty for merely touching the line of putt.

- Relaxed rules for "penalty areas" (currently called "water hazards"): Red- and yellow-marked penalty areas may cover areas of desert, jungle, lava rock, etc., in addition to areas of water; expanded use of red penalty areas where lateral relief is allowed; and there will be no penalty for moving loose impediments or touching the ground or water in a penalty area.

- Relaxed bunker rules: There will be no penalty for moving loose impediments in a bunker or for generally touching the sand with a hand or club. A limited set of restrictions (such as not grounding the club right next to the ball) is kept to preserve the challenge of playing from the sand; however, an extra relief option is added for an unplayable ball in a bunker, allowing the ball to be played from outside the bunker with a two-stroke penalty.

- Relying on player integrity: A player's "reasonable judgment" when estimating or measuring a spot, point, line, area or distance will be upheld, even if video evidence later shows it to be wrong; and elimination of announcement procedures when lifting a ball to identify it or to see if it is damaged.

- Pace-of-play support: Reduced time for searching for a lost ball (from five minutes to three); affirmative encouragement of "ready golf" in stroke play; recommending that players take no more than 40 seconds to play a stroke and other changes intended to help with pace of play.

Presented in digital, text-based form today, the new Rules will also now be translated into more than 30 languages and readied for final delivery via print and digital formats, including searchable Rules of Golf official apps developed by the USGA and The R&A.

Three important publications, to be distributed this fall, will help players as well as officials and provide interpretation and guidance in how the Rules are applied:

- The Player's Edition of the Rules of Golf: An abridged, user-friendly set of the Rules with shorter sentences, commonly used phrases, and diagrams. Written in the "second person," The Player's Edition is intended to be the primary publication for golfers.

- The Rules of Golf: The full edition of the Rules will be written in the third person and include illustrations. It is intended to be a more thorough version of the revised Rules.

- The Official Guide to the Rules of Golf: This "guidebook" replaces the Decisions book and will contain information to best support committees and officials. It includes interpretations on the Rules, committee procedures (available Local Rules and information on establishing the terms of the competition), and the Modified Rules of Golf for Players with Disabilities. It is a comprehensive resource document intended as a supplementary publication.

More than 30 "how-to-apply" videos and a summary of the principal changes are now available at usga.org/rules. Additional educational tools will be released in September.

Players are reminded that the current edition of the Rules of Golf (2016) must be applied when playing, posting scores or competing for the remainder of 2018. The Rules of Amateur Status and the Rules of Equipment Standards were not part of this review process.

As an extension of their support of the Rules of Golf worldwide, Rolex has made a commitment to support The R&A and the USGA's efforts to modernize golf's Rules. The Swiss watchmaker's contribution to excellence in golf is based on a rich heritage stretching back more than 50 years, forged through pivotal partnerships at every level of the game, from the sport's leading professional and amateur competitions and organizations, to players at the pinnacle of their sport worldwide.

About the USGA

The USGA conducts the U.S. Open, U.S. Women's Open, U.S.. Senior Open and the U.S. Senior Women's Open, as well as 10 amateur championships and international matches, attracting players and fans around the world. Together with The R&A, the USGA governs the game worldwide, jointly administering the Rules of Golf, Rules of Amateur Status, equipment standards and World Amateur Golf Rankings, with a working jurisdiction in the United States, its territories and Mexico

The USGA is one of the world's foremost authorities on research, development and support of sustainable golf course management practices. It serves as a primary steward for the game's history and invests in the development of the game through the delivery of its services and the work of the USGA Foundation. Additionally, the USGA's Course Rating and Handicap systems are used on six continents. For more information, visit www.usga.org.

About The R&A

Based in St Andrews, The R&A runs The Open, elite amateur events, international matches and rankings. Together The R&A and the USGA govern the sport of golf worldwide, operating in separate jurisdictions but sharing a commitment to a single code for the Rules of Golf, Rules of Amateur Status and Equipment Standards. The R&A, through R&A Rules Ltd, governs the sport worldwide, outside of the United States and Mexico, on behalf of over 36 million golfers in 143 countries and with the consent of 155 organisations from amateur and professional golf.

The R&A is committed to working for golf and supports the growth of the sport internationally and the development and management of sustainable golf facilities. For more information, visit www.randa.org.

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