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THE MODERATOR: Hello, and thank you for joining us for the joint USGA-R&A press conference. I'm Janeen Driscoll with the USGA, and I have with me here Martin Slumbers, the CEO of the R&A along with Prof. Steve Otto, the chief technology officer, and with me, Mike Whan, the CEO of the USGA as well as Thomas Pagel, the chief governance officer of the USGA.

Just a few shopping notes before we begin today. First of all, this conference is being recorded, and it will be provided to you at the end of the conference. We're also going to provide a transcript to you that we'll be able to distribute when we're done.

From a question-and-answer perspective, you should all see a Q&A button in your bottom right-hand corner or over to the right. For those credentials media members, you can insert your question directly in there. Please include your name as well as your outlet, and we will be able to list those questions and direct them to our panelists as they become available.

If you want to direct your question to a specific person, please feel free to let us know in that chat, as well, and we'll be able to deliver them.

With that, I'd love to open the conference, and Mike, please, take over.

MIKE WHAN: Thanks, Janeen. Thanks, everyone, for taking the time out of your morning to join us or afternoon or evening no matter where you are, and before I jump in let me just say on behalf of both the USGA and R&A, thanks for what you do for the game, as well.

Today's announcement which I'm assuming by now most of you have read, is another step in a long, deliberate, and I think you'd agree fairly transparent process over years to address the consistent historical trends in increased hitting distances.

It is a notice and comment, so as the name suggests, it's us, USGA and R&A, notifying you of our specific thoughts regarding both direction and timing on this topic, and as the name suggests, we start with the notice today, and then we have a comment period that will last until mid-August so we give the opportunity for the industry and all the other stakeholders to give us their feedback.

On the topic of feedback, the one thing I hope you don't miss if you've been following this process is this current notice and comment certainly reflects feedback we've heard from the marketplace, most importantly the No. 1 feedback we've consistently heard for virtually all aspects of the game, which is please don't negatively impact the recreational game and the strength of that game right now as this notice suggests and does not impact.

It's a fairly simple approach, meaning it's not only simple to understand, it's simple to implement at a local level, and it gives the game choice that it doesn't have today.

I'm just going to end before I give it to Martin by saying that I think a lot of -- in the debates and the arguments that will certainly ensue over the next days and weeks that we'll all be a part of, I think we'll constantly find ourselves in this discussion about somebody saying, why would you do this today, the game is fine today. Just know that on behalf of both of us, we understand and respect how great the game is. We certainly don't want to get in the way of that success. This is not really about today, it's about understanding the historical trends over the last 10, 20, 40 years and being able to be very predictive in terms of those trends over the next 20 or 40 years going forward and questioning whether or not the game can sustain 20 or 40 years from now the kind of increases that are so incredibly easy to predict. If we simply do nothing, we pass that to the next generation and to all the golf course venues around the world for them to just simply

figure out.

Again, not so much about today but about making sure tomorrow will be as successful as today.

With that, I'll send it over to you, Martin, on the other side of the pond.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Thank you, Mike, and greetings, everyone, from a cold and blustery St Andrews.

In March '22, as you'll be aware, we published the area of interest on the topic of hitting distance, and in it we raised two areas. Firstly, a ball for the whole game that had different overall distance standards, and secondly, a model local rule on the driver which would reduce the forgiveness in the face.

Over the period of comment we worked in a very collaborative way with the entire golf industry on a global basis, seeking views, listening to opinions, and frankly conducting further work on our side as a result.

We heard three key pieces of feedback. First, Mike has already mentioned, but let me repeat. Please do not do anything to affect the recreational game. Golf is doing well, and we don't want to undermine this.

The second piece of feedback we heard is an MLR on the driver would impact multiple clubs, and the unintended consequence could be 3-woods or other clubs that perform better than drivers and thus multiple clubs would need changing.

The third piece of feedback we heard is there is too much change proposed and it's too complex.

We listen to all of this very carefully and considered it in the context of all the data and analysis that we had, and accordingly we've amended our thinking and have been targeted and proportionate in the proposal today.

As custodians of our sport, we're of the view that at the elite male level, both amateur and professional, we've crossed the Rubicon with regards to where hitting distance is but more importantly where it is trending, and it's our responsibility as governing bodies to propose change to protect the long-term integrity of our sport.

Golf has become far more athletic, and technology has improved substantially, and it is the future impact that is the most pressing concern to the USGA and the R&A.

The notice and comment puts forward a new model local rule for elite golf that updates the parameters for the overall distance standard to today's game. The current test for conformity of a golf ball was set in 2004 and stipulates that a ball, when hit at 120 miles an hour club head speed at prescribed launch conditions cannot go further than 317 yards, plus a testing tolerance of three yards, so 320.

The 120 miles an hour club head speed parameter was set based on the fastest swing speeds back in 2003 and 2004. That was 19 years ago. We all know, thanks to the data we now have, how much our wonderful sport has evolved since then.

Updating this to the fastest speeds observed in our data set today leads to the new parameters under the MLR, being that a ball will conform under the model local rule for overall distance if when it is hit by a club head at 127 miles an hour at specified launch conditions, it goes no further than 317 plus three.

So let's be very clear. This notice and comment updates the testing parameters for today's game. Subject to this next comment period, it is intended to become effective January 2026 at the earliest.

The data behind hitting distance was very clearly laid out in our distance insights report published in 2020. There's been much commentary on this since then, and in our opinion the very clear conclusion is that over a long period of time, hitting distance at the elite end has consistently continued to increase, albeit punctuated with certain periods where the increase slowed. There is no doubt that this will continue the future, and this is the prime reason for us to act today.

If you're a keen follower of elite men's and boys' golf, it's clear that the next generation of top players are bringing even more technique and athleticism to golf and using the best of technology innovation to deliver even more consistent faster

swing speeds.

During the last four to five years, I've been asked about what are we going to do many times. I've always responded by saying this is a serious issue and needs serious people thinking very carefully. I have been hugely encouraged with the level of collaboration and debate by serious people, and Mike and I are both grateful for that.

This is a fantastic industry with terrific, responsible people, and I for one am very proud to be part of it.

Change is difficult, and we fully recognize that not all agree with our thinking. But we have listened and considered other points of view very carefully.

Our role is to protect the future of golf, both in terms of its overall integrity as a sport, its broad mix of skills to deliver excellence, and its environmental responsibilities over the next 20 to 30 years.

It would be irresponsible of us to not address these matters which have had so much attention. We know this is challenging, but it's our responsibility as governing bodies to do what is right and not what is easy and ensure we leave the game in a better state for future generations.

Thank you, and I would like now to just make one comment for those who love golf. John Paramor, who was one of the best referees certainly of my lifetime, sadly died a few weeks ago, and his funeral is this afternoon at this point in time. Certainly from the R&A's point of view, our thoughts are very much with John.

With that, I'll learn it back to Janeen to answer any questions anyone may have.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your thoughtful conversation that you have started. I do want to begin the Q & A right now. Again, I want to remind everybody that you can place your questions into the Q & A box that is on the right-hand side of your screen. We are starting to see some questions pop up. Please let us know if you have any questions directly in that box.

Q. I also want to remind everybody that the documents we released publicly are available on R&A.org and USGA.org/distanceinsights for quick reference.

Steve, I want to start with you. I'm hoping for the audience's sake you can unpack the technical aspects of this announcement. Specifically, can you tell the audience how you got to the launch conditions of 127 miles per hour and the 11 degrees and 2,200 RPM?

STEVE OTTO: Thank you, Janeen. Well, as Martin said in his introduction, we're benefiting from more and more, better and better data, so the 127 miles an hour is representative of the top 1 percent of shots actually on the PGA TOUR, thanks to them sharing their ShotLink system with us. So we're able to look at that, look at the fastest shots that are being hit by today's player. No single player has an average above that value, so it's representative of the club head speed they're using to attain these prestigious distances.

The level of 37 is really a hybrid of where optimal launch conditions would be for modern Tour balls, so that's how you get greater distance. It's increased club head speed and hitting close to those optimal launch conditions, so that's where it came from.

MIKE WHAN: It's probably worth mentioning, and Martin's comments about the last periods of comments, that using the 11-degree launch angle, we were originally proposing if you remember a year ago optimizing launch conditions for each individual ball, for maximizing each ball, and one of the comments we heard pretty clearly from manufacturers is the challenge with that both financially and operationally, and as a result of that went back to set launch conditions so that they can build balls with those conditions aware and know what the testing conditions will be like when they send them to the R&A and the USGA, so it's another one of those, maybe not where we were initially but through feedback got to this point.

THE MODERATOR: Thomas, can you just define for the audience why a model local rule?

THOMAS PAGEL: Yeah, thanks, Janeen. I think simply put, it's based on the feedback we received. The number one point of feedback that was consistent across all stakeholders was don't negatively impact the recreational game. While knowing we still need to address on the long end, the elite level, that really drove us to this decision of using a model local rule, and model local rules are not new to the game. Model local rules have always existed; there are 80 plus model local rules currently in the book. More than 10 are related to equipment. Some have been recently introduced such as greenway materials or club lengths, so it's a mechanism we use within the rule-making process, again, to ensure that we have no negative impact on the recreational game we felt that the best path forward was to introduce a model local rule here.

Q. Martin, why roll the ball back instead of just trying to limit where it is now?

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Well, I think when you look at trying to make a change, and a point that Mike and I feel very passionately about is we're not so much trying to solve a problem today; we're trying to solve where we believe it's going, and there is no doubt in our minds that the game is going in that direction, and will continue to move upwards. There is no evidence in history to prescribe otherwise, and by taking a step back here, we give ourselves some headroom for the next 10 to 15 years, depending on how the game develops.

But I would keep coming back to one point, which was when we set the formula back in 2004, that was reflective of the game's performance at that time and the way it was played with hitting distance, and what we've done is we've updated it. So we haven't changed the regulation. It's still 320 yards, but we've brought that up to the modern-day game, and I think that's highly important for all things that we're doing to reflect the modern game.

MIKE WHAN: I think I'd add to that, if you went back to 2002 and 2004 and the last time the R&A and the USGA made these changes, the quiet internal goal was to say, let's stop it; this is as far as it will go. So that proposal was let's stop distance, and here we are 20 years later, because none of these proposals do we want to simply put a governor on the ball and it falls out of the sky. We want athleticism to win. We want there to be an advantage to be longer versus shorter. We want people to pursue competitive advantage.

The whole "let's just stop it here" has been tried before, and let's how we get ourselves to 2023.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I think it's also worth saying that by sticking with the game formula which has been tried and tested, the longest drivers today will still be the longest drivers. The best drivers of the ball will still be the best drivers of the ball, and I still think that we've kept the integrity of the performance.

MIKE WHAN: You can do the homework, too, that the kind of distance impact we're talking about is probably going to last 12 to 15 years before we'll be right back to where we are now, given historical trends. We're not suggesting that we're taking the game to a place that it hasn't been recently and that we won't be right back here in 15 years.

STEVE OTTO: I think it's also worth being mindful that due to our process and our engagement with stakeholders, this is not a fast process. If you look at the top detail, this will run from 2019 to at least 2026, so we need to be reacting now so we have something in place to help us with that future vision rather than being able to impose it in a faster time scale. It's all about collaboration and engagement with stakeholders and getting views back.

Q. Mike, the difference between the recreational game and the elite level game specifically, is it expected that the college game will adopt the MLR? What are your thoughts?

MIKE WHAN: I'm not really sure yet. The thing that's interesting for me coming from a former commissioner role is when you're a commissioner you learn that you go out and tell everybody what you're thinking about doing before you get to the podium. In this agreed process that we have with manufacturers and the rest of the stakeholders, we're required to tell everybody what we're doing and then go talk to everybody.

We couldn't go out and talk to the NCAA or have real conversations with tours or other associations. In this notice and comment, it requires us to first notify and then go work on the conversations, so it's kind of backwards to what you see, but this way it forces us to be transparent in the process.

Do I think that there's an opportunity here for the NCAA to utilize the same thing? I do. Exactly where NCAA is on this, we haven't been able to have that conversation until now, so that'll be something that we can do going forward. It would make sense to me given what we see at the college level to implement this. Whether or not that's something that they will or won't do is conversations that we'll have to have going forward from today.

Q. Mike and Martin, if this model local rule is adopted and it's put in place, will you use it for any of your respective championships?

MIKE WHAN: Yes.

I won't speak for the R&A, but I think it's safe to say we wouldn't be suggesting this if we didn't think this would be something we would utilize, as well.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Same as Mike, yes.

Q. Thomas, are there measures in place to amend and/or add to these changes to continue to protect courses and the integrity of the game as technology continues to evolve?

THOMAS PAGEL: I think this approach specifically relying on a test that's been in place since 1976, as updated as we mentioned in 2004, by updating the standards now and doing it as a model local rule, it will allow us to actively manage this process for moving forward.

As Mike and Martin have both said, this is not about today. This is not about fixing a problem today. But it's about the question of if we sustain the current year-over-year increase, as Mike has said, that is historically consistent, what does the game look like in 15 and 20 years.

By putting this measure in place, if we're back here in 14 or 15 years, we'll have the mechanism to update the speeds at that time if we're no longer reflective of the fastest swinging players at that time.

Again, this provides a mechanism for us to be able to manage because one of the primaries is about eliminating the pressures for golf courses to continue to increase, and so we do think this will serve in that regard.

Q. Steve and perhaps Thomas, perhaps all of you can weigh in. Do you think with more complicated setups that this measure could have been avoided? Lots of questions specifically related to course setup. Can you address that directly?

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I think that there is a multitude of variables around how the game is played and how it's performed, to which course setup is one of them. But I do think it's a bit of a red herring here. Course setup, you need to maintain the integrity of the golf course and the way it's being played.

What is happening, has happened here over 20, 30 years is that balance -- in my opinion, the balance of skill and technology has got a little bit out of key for the very, very skilled players.

Course management, course setup (indiscernible). I do not see that it could have been the panacea to not have us where we are today.

THOMAS PAGEL: I would add to that, our greens section along with Steve and his team at the R&A have done a significant amount of research on the impact of golf course setup, golf course design and golf course maintenance. One of the things about this game is it is a global game, and this issue of distance is a global issue. So when you look at different environments, different factors, there is no silver bullet to suggest do this with golf course setup and you can solve a distance problem or have an impact on distance.

Now, there are setup and design features or functions that can have a minimal impact, one or two yards, on distance, but again, what you can do in the United States might not apply in Japan or Australia or Scotland, and so we have to be mindful of that because this isn't about a Tour or a series of professional tours. This impacts the elite amateur game, as well, so we're talking thousands of golf courses.

Then with that, as you look at footprints continuing to increase or expand from a setup perspective, then you also have the use of nutrients, resources, and that's not in like with the sustainability measures that as a game we really need to start thinking about.

MIKE WHAN: I also think, too, if you go back to that No. 1 feedback from the industry about please don't negatively affect the recreational game, higher rough, narrower fairways, more trees, those things all make sense if we're only talking about one entity, but make the game longer, harder, longer to play, more costly due to maintain. To Martin's point, we want to make sure that we're addressing the topic and not necessarily making the other 99 percent take the tax.

Q. If golf has seen technological advances for centuries, what makes you think you have the solution for 20, 40 years out?

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I don't think we're sitting here today suggesting we have the magic answer. We'd be the first to say I'm sure in 2002 and 2004 when the R&A and USGA were sitting on a call like this, they didn't envision that over 50 percent of drives of elite male golfers being over 300 yards, they couldn't probably kind of conceive that, or that the longest hitters could swing the golf club 120, 127, 128, 129 miles per hour. That's okay.

As we've said from the beginning, we want to encourage athleticism. We want young kids to be thinking about how to take advantage, and so this is a step.

Do I think it'll be the last step we make in the last 20 or 40 years? I don't. Do I think every aspect of it will be correct? Maybe not. But I can tell you that I think as a group, having gone through all of the different formats, and a lot of people throw things out and sort of have answers, but by going through all that, this is in our opinion overwhelmingly the best step we can take at this point. It buys the game some space, and it doesn't pass it forward to the next -- one option is simply say, hey, it's not worth all the debate and argument and the negatives that both organizations take on when we make these changes. We're aware of that. But not doing something, to Martin's opening point, is borderline irresponsible if not pure irresponsible in terms of just passing this on to the next generation or asking tens of thousands of golf courses to just figure it out and to keep investing millions of dollars to try to keep up with the game. That seems to be us completely not understanding what's an important role that we take on for the game.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: What is undoubtedly certain is the next set of variables will be different to the variables that we're dealing with at the moment. But what we mustn't lose sight of, and I don't think we have lost sight of throughout this, is protecting the underlying integrity and the fact that golf is a game of skill.

Q. Regarding the women's game, do you think there's a distance problem in the women's game, and what's your recommendation for the women's professional tours or women's majors?

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I think at this point there isn't a distance challenge in the women's game. You're certainly seeing changes in the women's game where more power, longer distances is coming in than maybe even five years ago. But at the moment there's plenty of headroom on the golf courses that we have for the women's game.

So we would not be intending to make any application of this rule in women's elite golf at this point.

THE MODERATOR: Thomas, Mike, anything else you want to add at this point?

MIKE WHAN: No, I think, like I said in this process, we'll go have those conversations now, but to Martin's point, there is room on most courses to move back quite a ways. Whether or not they implement this now, as in every case, is their decision, but this would provide choice longer term, and I think longer term we'll be glad this choice is available.

THE MODERATOR: On that same note, Mike, Martin, what have you heard from other stakeholders in the game, the PGA of America, the PGA TOUR or the DP World Tour?

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I think we've heard similar feedback to what we summarized earlier. Don't affect the recreational game. We're in a great place at the moment. We're benefiting hugely from the impact of COVID in 2020. The game of golf at the recreational level is good.

I think we also heard a bit about don't think about elite golf too narrow and don't just think about it as tour pros, and I think I feel very strongly about that. You only need to go and watch boys' elite golf to see that the next generation are coming along and they're hitting the ball as far if not further, and we certainly know that the tours leading up to the PGA TOUR the ball tends to be hit further and they cut back a bit when they get to the PGA TOUR.

MIKE WHAN: Yeah, I think we're certainly aware, and I served as a commissioner too long to not think that there's going to be more than a few if not many players who don't like this direction for obvious reasons. They are 25 years old, prime of their career, hitting the ball a long way; don't mess with that formula. I can't argue with them. I'm not saying that they're wrong.

But I also don't think anybody is asking them to think about what the game is going to be like in 30 years.

The one comment I would say, we got a lot of comments, and I would say most of those comments are reflective in the notice and comment that you're reading today. The one comment that we got that we really didn't implement was don't do anything, because when somebody says to us, please don't affect the retail business, but then I don't like an MLR, but then at the end you're essentially saying, I don't like any choice, that choice to us is irresponsible and looking the other way.

I've said this many times. You want to critique the USGA and the R&A over the last 20 years, you can be a critic on why didn't you do this five, seven, ten years ago, fair comment, and we've taken that on, too. But taking another 10 years off or looking another way and saying, distance is great, everybody is excited, and of course it's going to grow by more than a yard a year for the next 20 years, and we all know it, but we'll just turn the other cheek. That would be a shame because that's just to say the next generation in golf courses around the world just have to figure it out.

I get it. This won't be easy. Martin knows this, when I accepted this job two years ago and I called a bunch of friends including Martin about is this something I should do, the consistent feedback I heard is governance in a governing body is hard. People don't like change; they don't like the people who implement change. We're aware of that.

This isn't a day that Martin and I have said, hey, this is going to be fun; let's really enjoy the next couple months. But these debates are good for the game. These debates are good for us. And if anybody thinks that these debates in the past haven't reflected in changes and what we've recommended, you haven't been following the process very well.

They're not always easy. They're not always enjoyable, but I do think they have been beneficial.

Listen, do I expect everybody we announce today? I can promise you Martin and I will get 50 percent calls that say, is that all you're doing, and 50 percent of the calls will say, I can't believe you're doing that, and if the number is different than auto 50/50, it won't be by much, and that's governance.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, and along those same lines on the divide between how people feel, we're getting some questions about why 2026, and we've talked before about the deliberate process that we have. Steve, perhaps you can answer why 2026.

STEVE OTTO: It was part of the stakeholder feedback, Janeen, and we do listen to that, so we heard from manufacturers about what realistic time scales for implementation are. If balls will need to be shorter, they'll need to be of the utmost quality. It's not just about making inferior balls, it's about making high-quality balls which requires player testing and development cycles. This is where we've listened to the industry and tried to say at the earliest this will be January 2026.

THE MODERATOR: Thomas, a question for you that really leads into a lot of questions that we have, specifically about the word "bifurcation" and about the game be divided result. Can you just address that term, bifurcation, and address what a model local rule will do for the game?

THOMAS PAGEL: Yeah, look, that's a word that I think has caused some anxiety for governing bodies in the past, but in this instance, if somebody wants to call this bifurcation, I'm not going to have an argument over words with them. Use of a model local rule is something that we've done consistently over the years. We've always said it gives the game options, and in this case we're just giving the game options.

Those that conduct elite-level events, whether that be tours or elite amateur events now have an option if they want to deal with the issue of distance. As Steve rightly said, we're looking at 2026 at the earliest. This isn't people needing to make a decision around today, next year, even the next season. We're looking out to 2026.

Again, this is consistent with how we've acted in the past relative to model local rules and providing the game options, and based on the significant feedback we received, we think it's an appropriate here, and it's not the start to writing two different sets of rules. It truly is just an option around a piece of equipment.

THE MODERATOR: Martin, for you, there's been quite a few questions about implementation and about specifically at the elite amateur level, about golfers needing two different sets of golf balls. Can you just address what you think implementation will look like if this model local rule is adopted.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I think two things. One is a lot of conversation, a lot of discussion, and a lot of thinking about exactly where do we draw the line for elite amateur golf.

But I think it should also be reflected that once you get to a certain level, an elite level, the only golf you're really playing is against other elite players in elite tournaments, and so I think that the it will manage itself through carefully, but I think it's quite -- there is logic, and there will be a process, and we'll be able through clarity to be able to do it.

I do think it's worth remembering, we're not the first sport to do this. There are many other sports that have this sort of split model, and they seem to find a very clear way of being able to do it, and I'm sure we will.

THE MODERATOR: There are some questions coming up related to fans, Mike, and I'll address this to you. Are you concerned at all that especially younger fans of the game that you're trying to draw in will find the game less appealing or that they'll find that trading distance for shot making is going to make the game less interesting?

MIKE WHAN: Let me answer the question in reverse order because trading distance for shot making, I don't envision younger fans and athletes who have a desire to play this game at a high level are going to be trading off their distance pursuit. As Martin said, we're using the same testing technique that we used back in 2004. That does allow longer to be longer and quite frankly shorter to be shorter.

There will still be an opportunity, and quite frankly, I think all of us believe there will be a drive to continue to pursue distance as an advantage, and I believe that people will.

I think if you're talking about going to a Korn Ferry TOUR event and somebody hits it 340 today and hits it 336 tomorrow, is that going to be less awe inspiring? I don't think so. I mean, 336 is still whatever the numbers are. You're still going to -- you're watching elite level golf, whether it's amateur level, college level, pro level. I think the difference of what you'll be watching is not going to change, and the excitement behind that game.

I would say this: We didn't say it so far, but we've said it internally, maybe not as much publicly. I've been here two years; we have never had a meeting about scoring. Never with the R&A, not with the USGA. Meaning we're not waking up every Monday morning wondering what the score was last night or where it was at a different event in Asia or South Africa or America.

At the end of the day, scoring is going to be based about how a tour or an individual competition committee sets up a golf course. This is just to make sure that golf courses will still be in play in the next 20, 30 and 40 years.

People say to me, is this about protecting a golf course. Well, if you feel it's about protecting a golf course, that's fine, but it's how big is that list of golf courses going to be protected going to be in 40 years if we turn the other way.

I think young players, young athletes are going to pursue distance. I think they're going to be awe inspired by distance, and the best players in the world are still going to be the overwhelmingly best players in the world and by far the biggest marketing tool in the world because I can tell you as a 58-year-old golfer, I care about what people play on Tour, and that's not going to change.

STEVE OTTO: Perhaps I could pick up. One of the reports in the distance insights project actually tackled this and asked people what they enjoyed about the game, what they find interesting about the game, and to pick up on Mike's point, it was all about relative performance rather than absolute performance. It wasn't the absolute score or the absolute distance. It was the interaction of the stories between players is what people found exciting, not the absolute distance they were hitting the ball or they were scoring, and that came out in those distance reports.

Q. Steve, do these changes suggest we are looking to protect the relevance of courses, venues and sustainability challenges rather than rebalance the importance of control, shot making against distance for elite players?

STEVE OTTO: I don't see those as two opposing topics. I see them as sympathetic, and we are looking at, as Thomas said earlier, the sustainability aspects of this, the footprint of golf courses, the uses of water, the uses of pesticides, et cetera, but also looking at protecting the integrity of the sport to ensure that distance doesn't become too dominant in determining success.

Q. Thomas, what obstacles do you foresee being the hardest to overcome in this process?

THOMAS PAGEL: Well, look, I don't know if I'll talk about it in terms of obstacles, but certainly process, and Mike and Martin have both referenced process. It's important to us in this process. It can be long, frustrating for some folks who are looking for action to happen sooner, but the reality is we owe this to the game. We owe it to the manufacturers to go through this deliberate process. We've gone from two areas of interest where we've talked about research topics and now we're in a stage of proposing a rule change that we're going to have to talk to the industry about, get their feedback both on implementation but also the substance of what's part of the model local rule that we're proposing today.

What are the biggest challenges? I'm not sure I have the answer to that question just yet because frankly everyone is hearing about this today for the first time, and so the conversations are going to kick off from this point forward.

Q. Thomas and Steve, perhaps for all of you, what challenges or more importantly what lessons did you learn from other MLRs that you have put in place in the game?

THOMAS PAGEL: I think just given my history from a rules of golf perspective, model local rules are all about understanding perspective. They usually come to us because a course or tournament organizers or Tour operators say hey, we have a unique challenge, can you help us address it, or we identify a unique challenge and we look to address it.

I think it really is about understanding perspectives, and we'll certainly be sure to do that here, as well.

STEVE OTTO: I'm not sure if this really answers it, but I'm really looking forward to the next five months and being able to take these conversations forward with people. We somewhat operate in a vacuum. As Mike said earlier, we have internal conversations, we think about these things. Today marks a point where we can now go out and talk to the industry about how we could implement this, what measures people need.

Really it's about the challenges of finding enough time to have all those serious conversations with people to look forward to this.

MIKE WHAN: I think that it's safe to say, I think, for all of our conversations we have all around the world with players, course owners, stakeholders, the thing that we'll probably find most challenging is getting others to be as committed to the future of the game as they are to the exact current state of the game.

In a lot of cases, and I can speak to this in my former role, if you work for an association, that association is about right now and about opportunities and jobs and careers and financial opportunities, and it's difficult to talk about 20, 30 or 40 years from now because that's not what's driving you. There's people in the business today that are connected to manufacturers and they're about moving product today, and we get all that. That's real.

Sometimes it's challenging no matter who you're talking to get somebody to stop talking about today or tomorrow literally and start talking about whether or not we're okay in 20, 30 or 40 years.

Generally speaking when you approach somebody about that conversation, they don't want to have that conversation anymore because that requires choice, and their preferred choice is nothing. But when you ask them about would you agree that distance is not going to stop over the next 20 or 30 years, they do, they just don't want to get to the choice part, and we get that. Nor is that their role.

I would tell you that the hardest part always in these kind of things -- to Thomas' point, a lot of local rules that are in play were tours or other associations or tournaments coming to us asking for help to implement something at their level that the game didn't need across the board, and some of them the other way around, the R&A and the USGA.

So I would just make sure that the general audience knows that MLRs haven't been viewed as a negative thing. In some cases tournaments have come to us, and we've implemented some MLRs that we've sort of said, not really sure you need it, but if it could be helpful, here's something you can use within your own game. There is a broad range.

But I think it's difficult to ask today's audience, today's player, today's even recreational golfer and maybe even today's media to really consider what this looks like in 30 years if the answer is do nothing.

THE MODERATOR: I think we'll end with this. Martin, can you just go through for us what happens now as part of our governance process. I know Steve mentioned that very briefly about accepting comments back. Can you just talk a little bit about what you foresee happening within 2023.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: So for the next six months, what I see happening is a series of conversations that are with groups and parts of the golf system who are maybe not as committed to the change that we are, and I see a series of conversations with the industry more broadly about the practical steps to be able to implement along these lines.

What there will be, and what we are absolutely certain of, is it will be collaborative and it will be thoughtful. I'm probably not as excited as Steve is for the next six months, but I think that this is a very important moment for our sport and for the future, and I care deeply about the game of golf being a game of skill, and I think this is a great way of us making sure that it remains a game of skill.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, Martin. Last question for both of you. Do either of you anticipate that your respective championships will be played on shorter courses moving forward?

MIKE WHAN: Fortunately or unfortunately, you can look online and see where we're going to be playing for the next 15 or 20 years, so I could make up an answer to that question, but you know where the U.S. Open and the U.S. Women's Open are going to be played for the next decade if not 15 years, so those choices have been made for us.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I think the -- there is no simple answer to that question. This is not a static problem that you can explicitly state, and I think we will stay dynamic to how the game continues to evolve. Certainly for us, a lot of our courses have the weather that comes in. We actually very rarely play the distance that we publish at because we're moving around based on the weather, and we will keep to making sure it's dynamic and keep making sure that it's reflective of the game.

Let's not forget, this change will have happened no earlier than January 2026, so all of us have got three years' worth of our great championships to stage yet.

MIKE WHAN: Us New Jersey folks are having some Scottish weather right now, Martin.

MARTIN SLUMBERS: Enjoy it.

THE MODERATOR: I think we'll wrap on that note. Martin, Mike, Thomas, Steve, we've received a lot of comments about the air of collaboration that they're seeing on this call between the USGA and the R&A, and Mike, perhaps I'll turn it over to you just for some ending remarks.

MIKE WHAN: I appreciate people making those comments. As I said, governance is hard. It doesn't -- this is not the thing that we're most proud of, as people sometimes tend to think. We know this is going to be difficult, and I would just say to the group that sees that, I'm glad you do, because I can speak for Thomas and the rest of the USGA, we're proud to be

partnered with the R&A. They're respectful, not only of us but of the game, and I'm glad we're living this together, because as Steve said, sometimes you have to do this in more of a vacuum and you push back, challenge each other and we haven't loved each other the whole way of the process, but we've respected each other and always had the vision.

What I've really respected about Martin is at the end of the day, it's about what's going to be good for the game in 20 or 40 years, not what's good for tomorrow. I can promise you none of us have had a conversation about where we're going to play an Open Championship or a U.S. Open, and this is so critical for that. This is going -- shame on us if we would ever be making a decision along that lines. This is about whether or not the game is healthier 20 years from now than it is today or at least as healthy.

THE MODERATOR: Martin?

MARTIN SLUMBERS: I don't need add any words on top of Mike's.

THE MODERATOR: Steve, Thomas, anything else you wish to share before we end?

THOMAS PAGEL: No, I just appreciate everyone taking the opportunity to join us this morning, and as Steve has mentioned this is the next step in the process and we're going to begin this immediately having discussions with stakeholders and others interested in the topic.

THE MODERATOR: For all of us at the USGA and the R&A, thank you very much for joining us. We will follow up in due course with a copy of this recording as well as the transcript. You know that the documents are located at R&A.org and USGA.org/distanceinsights, and we'll be happy to take your questions via email directly following this conference. Thank you again for participating, and we look forward to talking to you soon. Cheers.
