LIBERTY CORNER, N.J., USA AND ST. ANDREWS, Scotland (March 14, 2023) – The USGA and The R&A have proposed a Model Local Rule (MLR) that gives competition organizers the option to require use of golf balls that are tested under modified launch conditions to address the impacts of hitting distance in golf.

The MLR is intended for use only in elite competitions and, if adopted, will have no impact on recreational golf.

The proposal notice, which can be found here, was sent to golf equipment manufacturers on March 13, following the Equipment Rulemaking Procedures established by the governing bodies in 2011. Manufacturers and golf stakeholders can provide feedback until Aug. 14, 2023. If adopted, the proposal would take effect on Jan 1, 2026.

Golf balls that conform to the MLR must not exceed the current Overall Distance Standard (ODS) limit of 317 yards (plus 3 yards tolerance) at modified Actual Launch Conditions (ALC) with a clubhead speed of 127 mph and based on a calibration setup of 11 degrees and 37 revolutions per second (2,220 rpm) as part of this proposal.

All other balls, including those typically used by recreational golfers with lower swing speeds, would continue to be tested using the existing ALC values (120 mph, and a calibration setup of 10 degrees and 42 revolutions per second – 2,520 rpm). The current ODS limit of 317 yards will remain unchanged and would be applied to both testing setups.

The Overall Distance Standard was established in 1976 as a ball test intended to reflect maximum potential hitting distance by the longest hitters currently playing the game.

There is a direct correlation between clubhead speed and hitting distance (further research having been published in the Distance Insights reports). Over the last 20 years hitting distance has increased on average by around 1 yard per year.

The modified testing setup in the proposed MLR is expected to reduce hitting distance by 14-15 yards on average for the longest hitters with the highest clubhead speeds.

MEDIA: VIDEO OF MIKE WHAN AND THOMAS PAGEL EXPLAINING THIS MODEL LOCAL RULE CAN BE FOUND HERE

“Hitting distances at the elite level of the game have consistently increased over the past 20, 40, and 60 years. It’s been two decades since we last revisited our testing standards for ball distances,” said Mike Whan, CEO of the USGA. “Predictable, continued increases will become a significant issue for the next generation if not addressed soon. The MLR we are proposing is simple to implement, forward-looking and does so without any impact on the recreational game. We are taking the next steps in this process, guided first and foremost by doing what’s right by the entire game.”

Martin Slumbers, CEO of The R&A, said, “We have worked closely with the golf industry throughout this process and taken time to listen carefully to their perspectives and reflect on the helpful and constructive feedback they have provided. At the core of our proposal is a desire to minimize the impact on a flourishing recreational game. We believe the proposed Model Local Rule will help us move forward in a way that protects the inherent qualities of the sport and reduces the pressure to lengthen courses. This is an important issue for golf and one which needs to be addressed if the sport is to retain its unique challenge and appeal.”

The governing bodies have consulted closely with the golf industry throughout the Distance Insights project, which commenced in 2018 but has been under continual study over at least the last two decades. This is the fourth formal feedback period to be opened in the last five years, in addition to continuing stakeholder engagement across the game, including golfers, fans, competition organizers, equipment manufacturers, golf course owners, superintendents, architects and others.

Based on feedback received from manufacturers, the USGA and The R&A are no longer considering the use of launch conditions that are optimized for each individual golf ball model to evaluate conformance. Similarly, they are not pursuing a reduction in the characteristic time limit in the existing Equipment Standards or changes to the Moment of Inertia limit of drivers at this time.

The USGA and The R&A set out to address the long-term trend of increased hitting distances and course lengthening that they believe threatens golf’s long-term sustainability and undermines the core principle that a broad and balanced set of playing skills should remain the primary determinant of success in golf.

The findings of extensive research by the governing bodies into distance (along with the supporting research and data) were set out within the Distance Insights report into the Implications of Hitting Distance in February 2020 under two key themes: the pressure on courses to continue to lengthen and ensuring that distance did not become predominant in the balance of skills required in golf.
The report also found that the overall trend of golf courses becoming longer has adverse consequences, including by increasing the cost and time to play, limiting the advancement of sustainability efforts and reducing the challenge of courses – in some cases creating a risk of them becoming obsolete.

The 2022 Annual Driving Distance Report, which aggregates hitting distance data reported by seven professional men’s and women’s tours worldwide, has also been released, and can be found here.

Data provided for the report showed that the average clubhead speed on the PGA TOUR was 114.6 mph last year, with an average launch angle of 10.3° and average spin of 2,597 rpm. The mean of the fastest 1 percent of clubhead speeds was 127.5 mph in 2022, while the mean of the fastest 5 percent of clubhead speeds was 124.2 mph.

The Annual Driving Distance Report also reports a 4 percent average year-over-year increase in hitting distance across all seven tours, with all but the Japan Golf Tour and LPGA Tour reporting the longest values on record. The Korn Ferry Tour recorded the highest annual hitting average across all tours in 2022, at 307.8 yards.

For more information visitwww.usga.org/distanceinsights or www.randa.org

About the USGA

The USGA is a nonprofit organization that celebrates, serves and advances the game of golf. Founded in 1894, we conduct many of golf's premier professional and amateur championships, including the U.S. Open and U.S. Women's Open. With The R&A, we govern the sport via a global set of playing, equipment, handicapping and amateur status rules. The USGA campus in Liberty Corner, New Jersey, is home to the Association's Research and Test Center, where science and innovation are fueling a healthy and sustainable game for the future. The campus is also home to the USGA Golf Museum, where we honor the game by curating the world's most comprehensive archive of golf artifacts. To learn more, visit usga.org.

About The R&A

References in this document to The R&A are to R&A Rules Limited. Together The R&A, based in St. Andrews, Scotland, and the USGA govern the sport of golf worldwide, operating in separate jurisdictions but with a commitment to a single code for the Rules of Golf, Rules of Amateur Status and Equipment Standards. The R&A governs the sport worldwide, outside of the United States and Mexico, on behalf of over 36 million golfers in 144 countries and with the consent of 159 organizations from amateur and professional golf.

The R&A aims to invest £200 million in developing golf over a decade and supports the growth of the sport internationally, including the development and management of sustainable golf facilities. For more information visit http://www.randa.org

For further information: Janeen Driscoll, USGA Communications, jdriscoll@usga.org

---

https://mediacenter.usga.org/press-releases?item=123005