USGA Media Center

LIBERTY CORNER, N.J., USA and ST. ANDREWS, Scotland (Dec. 6, 2023) – The R&A and USGA will update the testing conditions used for golf ball conformance under the Overall Distance Standard (ODS), which will take effect from January 2028. The decision aims to reduce the impact increased hitting distances have on golf's long-term sustainability while minimizing the impact on the recreational game.

The revised ball testing conditions will be as follows: 125-mph clubhead speed (equivalent to 183 mph ball speed); spin rate of 2200 rpm and launch angle of 11 degrees. The current conditions, which were established 20 years ago, are set at 120 mph (equivalent to 176 mph ball speed), 2520 rpm with a 10-degree launch angle.

The revised conditions are based on analysis of data from the worldwide tours and the game over several years and are intended to ensure that the ODS (whose limit will remain unchanged at 317 yards with a 3-yard tolerance) continues to represent the ability of the game's longest hitters. An analysis of ball speeds among golf's longest hitters in 2023 shows that the fastest 10 players had an average ball speed of 186 mph, while the average ball speed of the fastest 25 was 183.4 mph (the very fastest averaged 190 mph).

The longest hitters are expected to see a reduction of as much as 13-15 yards in drive distance. Average professional tour and elite male players are expected to see a reduction of 9-11 yards, with a 5-7-yard reduction for an average LET or LPGA player.

The change in testing speed is expected to have a minimal distance impact, 5 yards or less, for most recreational golfers. Research shows an average swing speed of 93 mph for male golfers and 72 mph for female players.

Existing balls approved for conformance in 2027 may continue to be used by recreational golfers until January 2030 to give golfers, manufacturers and retailers additional time to adjust. These decisions are in line with the commitments made by the governing bodies at the project's inception.

A significant portion of golf ball models that are currently in the market – and more than 30 percent of all golf ball models submitted for conformance across the game – are expected to remain conforming after these changes are applied.

"Governance is hard. And while thousands will claim that we did too much, there will be just as many who said we didn't do enough to protect the game long-term," said Mike Whan, CEO of the USGA. "But from the very beginning, we've been driven to do what is right for the game, without bias. As we've said, doing nothing is not an option – and we would be failing in our responsibility to protect the game's future if we didn't take appropriate action now."

Martin Slumbers, CEO of The R&A, said, "We are convinced that this decision is one of the key ways of achieving a sustainable future for golf, protecting the integrity of the game and meeting our environmental responsibilities. The measure we are taking has been carefully considered and calibrated while maintaining the 'one game' ethos deemed to be so important to the golf industry. Importantly, it also keeps the impact on recreational golfers to an absolute minimum. We are acting now because we want to ensure that future generations can enjoy the unique challenge of golf as much as we do."

The Notice of Decision follows the most thorough and comprehensive examination of the issue in the game's history through the Distance Insights project, which was launched in 2018 and gathered data, shared research and solicited feedback from golf course owners, players, and stakeholders across the game. Data provided by the seven major worldwide tours has also been analyzed by the governing bodies, who have published Annual Driving Distance Reports every year since 2015.

The reports followed the governing bodies' joint Conclusions from the Distance Insights Project: Implication of Hitting Distance in Golf, which shared the reasons why addressing the continuing trend of hitting distance increases and subsequent course lengthening is critical to the game's long-term sustainability.

All golf ball and club manufacturers were advised of the decision on Tuesday and were given full technical details and an implementation timeline. The notice of decision takes into account the extensive research and feedback received from

manufacturers and other industry stakeholders throughout the six-year process and following multiple Areas of Interest and proposals starting in 2021 as part of the Equipment Rulemaking process.

Click on each link for official documents and a letter sent to the industry here:

- Letter
- Technical documents

The extensive feedback received showed worldwide sentiment that the retention of a single set of playing rules and equipment standards is critically important to the sport and should apply across the game. Feedback from manufacturers resulted in the timeline being extended to 2028 to allow more time for innovation and production of new products for elite and recreational players.

In addition to the new ball-testing conditions, the governing bodies will:

- **Expand the testing approach to better detect 'Driver Creep,' which can result in drivers exceeding the limits set out in the Equipment Rules.** This is a change in the testing methodology for submitted drivers, to identify and proactively address driver models that are within current tolerance levels and have Characteristic Time (CT) values that are more likely to exceed the limit through regular use.
- **Continue to monitor drivers and explore possible additional options related to distance. Specifically, we will research the forgiveness of drivers and how they perform with off-center hits.** This is an ongoing review and we will seek input from and continue to work with the industry, including manufacturers, to identify driver design features that can be regulated as a means to reward center impact position hits versus mis-hits.

The R&A and the USGA are guided by an overarching principle to continue to preserve the fundamental elements of golf – protecting the integrity of golf courses, including their overall length, and ensuring that a variety of skills are needed to be successful.

Longer golf courses require additional resources such as water, the cost of renovating or moving elements like tees and bunkers continues to rise and other long-term impacts have been identified as a result of increased distance. The governing bodies believe that if the sport is to enjoy a sustainable long-term future then these economic and environmental impacts have to be kept under control.

The Overall Distance Standard was first introduced in 1976 and has been updated on three previous occasions (1980, 2002 and 2004). This is the first time that test speeds have been updated since 2004, when the current standard was set based on the longest hitters at that time.

Details on the study and complete technical data on the Distance Insights project can be found at www.usga.org/distanceinsights.

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