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England Golf comments on R&A & USGA announcement of proposal to introduce Model Local Rule (MLR) option for golf balls used in elite competition.

England Golf ("EG") appreciates that the Governing Bodies have done a very significant amount of work on the Distance Insights Project since 2018 and values the opportunity to provide stakeholder feedback following the media release concerning the proposed Model Local Rule ("MLR") and Notice to Manufacturers dated 14 March 2023.

As the 'not for profit' Governing Body for amateur golf in England, the roles of EG include (but are not limited to) the following: (1) to support club and county golf; (2) to increase participation in golf in England; (3) to organise a significant number of amateur competitions, including elite amateur championships for men and women and (4) to train and prepare England's top amateur golfers to reach their optimum performance.

While it therefore follows that EG is not directly concerned with elite professional (i.e. tour standard) golf, a significant number of elite amateur players aspire to compete at that level and in preparation for turning professional, some compete in events in which tour professionals also play and where the MLR would be in operation.

EG notes that for the first time in the history of our sport, the Governing Bodies are proposing an effective bifurcation of the Equipment Rules. Each of the three distinct separate groups of golfers i.e. handicap golfers; elite amateur golfers and tour professionals would be affected by this in different ways.

1. Introductory Comments on Bifurcation of the Rules of Golf

- (a) EG submits that making the game of golf more complicated via two sets of equipment rules - at a time when all stakeholders are seeking to grow the game - would not only confuse golfers and fans but in all likelihood, not create an overall 'good look' for our sport, by detracting rather than adding anything. For example, the record books would have to distinguish scores recorded with 'longer' and 'shorter' balls.
- (b) Likewise, and more specifically, separating the equipment promotional value of the best players in the world from the paying fan market would not maintain the commercial relevance of elite competition.



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- (c) In our fast-moving modern digital world with much competition, every sport must guard its entertainment value/appeal with huge sensitivity to maintain its own unique characteristics.
- (d) Historically, ours has been a sport where golfers of all abilities can play the same courses (at varying length) while using the same equipment and balls that are generally available to and used by all golfers. This proposal would end that feature.

2. Impact on Professional "Touring Pro" Golfers

EG's main areas of challenge on the proposed MLR are:

- (a) The biggest hitter doesn't win every week - as evidenced by The 2023 Open Champion, whose driving distance was comparatively 'short.'
- (b) Championship/Tournament course set up - where is the substantive evidence that golf courses must keep getting longer, as opposed to being more creatively set up to elicit different shot making to counter the "bombed" drive? Again, Hoylake exemplified the importance of avoiding the punitive bunkering.
- (c) If the rules of the elite/professional game are not sufficiently protective, the current set of rules could be strengthened first to ensure no further distance debate/concern in the future.
- (d) The majority of golf fans do not want to see professional golf made more difficult; they enjoy and wonder at the skill and strength of touring pros. While EG agrees that distance at this level should not be allowed to increase, EG suggests that the sport is at but not beyond an acceptable proverbial 'line in the sand'.

3. Impact on Elite Amateur Golfers

- (a) EG does not believe there is an issue within the amateur game in terms of how far the best amateur players hit the golf ball. From a championship perspective we have not encountered situations whereby we consider current or previously used courses obsolete due to the distance elite amateur golfers are hitting the golf ball.
- (b) EG has huge concerns over the proposed "transition" line from Amateur Club and Regional golfers to elite level, with part of the proposal certain to encompass the Amateur and US Amateur Championships (including qualifying) and potential.
- (c) recommendation for other International and National Championships. Even if the MLR is not to be specifically directed towards junior golfers, under 18 golfers proliferate in open amateur events and the movement of such young golfers



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between MLR events and non-MLR events will be unnecessarily challenging for them - and actually unfair.

For such golfers, the following questions arise:

- How/when/where does any elite amateur obtain different i.e. MLR product?
- The cost of developing an MLR product with a limited market is highly likely to be passed onto handicap golfers via increased prices of product used by them?
- Likewise, is there an expectation that elite amateur golfers will have their ball purchase level demands increased to purchase two different products?
- When would elite amateurs get the chance to practice and/or be fitted with golf balls of different playing characteristics, given they will also be practising for and competing in non-MLR events?
- How can our elite amateurs consistently develop/improve when they would in all probability be flip/flopping between products throughout their season?

4. All other Golfers

EG firmly believes that there is no distance issue for other golfers and welcomes the fact that the Governing Bodies proposal does not impact them. Anything that makes the game harder (in this case potentially introducing a ball that doesn't travel as far) for handicap golfers is detrimental to the sport and should be avoided.