

Joint Statement of Principles

As the governing authorities for the Rules of Golf including equipment Rules, The R&A in St. Andrews, Scotland and the United States Golf Association (USGA) have continued to monitor closely the effects of advancing equipment technology on the playing of the game. The R&A and the USGA are also aware that this subject has attracted wide-ranging comment and a number of conflicting views. History has proved that it is impossible to foresee the developments in golf equipment that advancing technology will deliver. It is of the greatest importance to golf's continuing appeal that such advances are judged against a clear and broadly accepted series of principles.

The purpose of this statement is to set out the joint views of the R&A and the USGA, together with the framework of key principles and policies which guide their actions.

In a historical context, the game has seen progressive developments in the clubs and balls available to golfers who, through almost six centuries, have sought to improve their playing performance and enjoyment.

While generally welcoming this progress, the R&A and the USGA will remain vigilant when considering equipment Rules. The purpose of the Rules is to protect golf's best traditions, to prevent an over-reliance on technological advances rather than skill, and to ensure that skill is the dominant element of success throughout the game.

The R&A and the USGA continue to believe that the retention of a single set of rules for all players of the game, irrespective of ability, is one of golf's greatest strengths. The R&A and the USGA regard the prospect of having permanent separate rules for elite competition as undesirable and have no current plans to create separate equipment rules for highly skilled players.

Golf balls used by the vast majority of highly skilled players today have largely reached the performance limits for initial velocity and overall distance which have been part of the Rules since 1976. The governing bodies believe that golf balls, when hit by highly skilled golfers, should not of themselves fly significantly further than they do today. In the current circumstances, the R&A and the USGA are not advocating that the Rules relating to golf ball specifications be changed other than to modernize test methods.

The R&A and the USGA believe, however, that any further significant increases in hitting distances at the highest level are undesirable. Whether these increases in distance emanate from advancing equipment technology, greater athleticism of players, improved player coaching, golf course conditioning or a combination of these or other factors, they will have the impact of seriously reducing the challenge of the game. The consequential lengthening or toughening of courses would be costly or impossible and would have a negative effect on increasingly important environmental and ecological issues. Pace of play would be slowed and playing costs would increase.

The R&A and the USGA will consider all of these factors contributing to distance on a regular basis. Should such a situation of meaningful increases in distances arise, the R&A and the USGA would feel it immediately necessary to seek ways of protecting the game.

In determining any future amendments to the Rules, or to associated procedures that may from time to time prove necessary, the R&A and the USGA will continue their respective policies of consultation with interested parties, including the use of notice and comment procedures, and will take account of the views expressed. The achievement and maintenance of worldwide uniformity in equipment rules through close coordination between the R&A and the USGA is a clear priority.

The R&A and the USGA are concerned that, on an increasing number of occasions, new products are being developed and marketed which potentially run counter to the principles expressed in this statement. These product launches, without prior consultation with the governing bodies, can lead to considerable difficulties in formulating appropriate equipment rules and to undesirable conflicts between manufacturers and rule makers. The R&A and the USGA intend to bring forward proposals designed to improve procedures for the approval of new products.

The R&A and the USGA believe that the principles stated in this document will, when carefully applied, serve the best interests of the game of golf.