



The USGA And R&A's New Model Local Rule for Golf Balls Under Heavy Scrutiny by the PGA Tour

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Earlier this year, the USGA (United States Golf Association) and the R&A banded together to propose new testing rules for golf balls that would reduce the total drive distance for top players of the game by around 20 to 25 yards. The new testing protocol has received a predictably unenthusiastic response from the PGA Tour which heard arguments from the two associations and manufacturers during a meeting on 30th May 2023.

Currently, the Iron Byron, the industry-standard robotic equipment used to test golf balls, uses a driving speed of 120 mph, at a 10-degree angle, and up to 2,520 rpm of backspin. While the details are not yet finalized, with the proposed rule change, the robot will be reconfigured to use a driving speed of 127 mph, an angle of 11 degrees, and 2,200 rpm of backspin.

The USGA and R&A hope that the changed speed of the driver, angle, and backspin rate during testing will force manufacturers to create heavier golf balls that don't exceed the Overall Distance Standard (ODS) of 317 yards of combined carry distance and roll.

USGA CEO Mike Whan defended the rule change by arguing that it will prepare the game for the future. Since hitting distances have increased consistently over the history of the sport and the last time the testing standards were revised was over two decades ago, the two governing bodies hope to address the growing concern and create a more resilient golfing environment for future players.

A majority of the members of the PGA Tour have made their opposition to the proposed rule change known. Andy Pazder, Chief Tournaments and Competitions Officer for the PGA Tour expressed the organization's reluctance by saying, "If they decide they are going to move forward then it comes back to us, the PGA Tour, to ultimately make a decision on whether we'd use the model of the local rule in competitions. It's way too early for me to theorize if we'd take one position or another."

If the rule change is adopted, it will go into effect starting January 2026 and individual events and tours still retain the choice of whether they want to adopt the rule in their competitions. Moreover, the USGA rule will only impact players participating at the highest levels of the game and the modified balls will not be introduced at the recreational level.

Tell Me More Golf, a golf information platform, has weighed in on the recent discussions about the new proposed Model Local Rule that may have a significant impact on the future of golf.

Patrick Corley, the Editor-in-Chief at Tell Me More Golf summarized his thoughts on why the rule change has had a tepid reception by saying, "The major point of contention among golf athletes is that the rule is designed based on the driving distance achieved only by some of the top players in the game. Only two golfers, Rory McIlroy and Brandon Matthews have an average driving distance that is over the 317 yards limit. Moreover, none of the players can hit the 127 mph clubhead speed. Cameron Champ, who is at the top of the pack, only gets up to a 126.47 mph average while the overall Tour average is just 115.21 mph. So, it seems the rules are going to create a lot of uncertainty for all players while only limiting the driving distance for a small percentage of them."

Tell Me More Golf is a coaching website that answers its readers' most pressing questions about the sport with instructional articles, videos, rants, tips, and editorials. Patrick brings over 50 years of experience to the table, sharing the techniques and products that he regularly uses in playing and coaching other players. Some of the popular categories on the website include Golf Equipment, Golf Apparel, and Golf for Beginners.

For more insights into the sport, along with information on golf concepts such as the gap wedge distance, readers are urged to visit the Tell Me More Golf website and follow the publication on its social media.

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Tell Me More Golf

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TellMeMoreGolf.com is the culmination of my 50+ years of golf experience; a golf coaching website!

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