

with Charlie Epps

TALKIN' GOLF

No-anchor rule hurts golf

By the time this column appears, the 90-day review period will have passed on the USGA and R&A's proposed rule change to make anchoring the putter into the body illegal. The proposed change came down on Nov. 28, and golf's two governing bodies said they would be "open for comments" for 90 days.

That 90-day period ended Feb. 28.

No matter what they decide, I'm against changing the rules and banning anchored putters. It's no secret I disagree with some of the USGA and R&A's rules and decisions.

The dumbest rule of all is the stroke-and-distance penalty for hitting a shot out of bounds. You want to speed up play? Out of bounds should be played like a lateral hazard: drop your ball where it went out and keep playing. We tried that in the 1960s in Argentina and it worked great.

Part of life is making mistakes. You have to accept your mistakes and move on. As much as we'd like to, you can't go back.

That's what the USGA and R&A should do. From the Nov. 28 announcement, they're admitting they made a mistake and now want to correct the error they made many years ago.

Anchoring the club into the body and creating a fulcrum to remove nerves from putting is not the way the game was meant to be played. The USGA and R&A should have outlawed anchoring a long, long time ago. But to change the rule now will create a can of worms for everyone.

While I was at the Northern Trust Open in L.A. last month, I saw a photo on the wall in the men's locker room at Riviera Country Club. It was a black and white picture, probably from the 1920s or '30s, of a man anchoring his putter into his thigh. Right or wrong, anchoring has been part of the game for nearly a century.

Golf isn't suffering because of the long putter or anchoring. Billy Casper won 51 PGA Tour events and three major championships during the Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus era. Casper anchored his putter against his thigh. There are many examples throughout history of players anchoring putters.

I admire a guy like Orville Moody, who had the yips so bad with a normal putter that he couldn't hit the ball. But he still won the U.S. Open in 1969 because of his supreme ball-striking. Then he got out on the Senior Tour and started using a long putter. He won 19 times with a long putter and no one said a word about it. Everyone was happy.

Back in the 1980s, then-Vice President George H.W. Bush came to Houston Country Club and was struggling with his putter. I gave him a long putter and that seemed to work better. It helped him enjoy the game more.

Tim Clark, Carl Petterson and, above all, Bernhard Langer should be congratulated for overcoming the yips, which is an uncontrollable nervous condition that doesn't have a cure (outside of a bottle of scotch).

The truth is if it was easy to use a long putter or belly putter, then everyone would do it. It's not easy, though. You still have to put in hours of practice no matter how you putt.

For the USGA and R&A to now say anchoring is illegal is a big mistake.

It wouldn't surprise me if the Champions Tour amends the rule and allows players to anchor the club the way they're doing it now. The PGA Tour might amend the rule and allow anchoring, too. There are 27,000 PGA club professionals who don't want the rule changed. We don't want to make the game harder than it is. We want to grow the game, speed up play and let people have fun on the golf course.

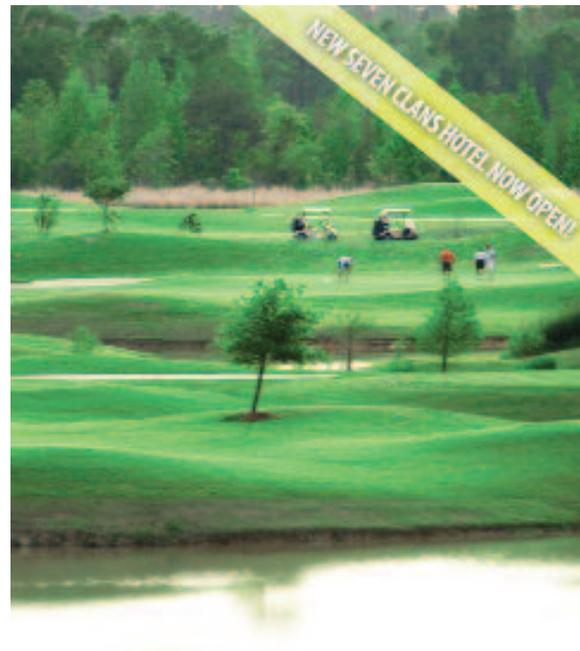
The USGA and R&A should leave well enough alone. I've listened to all arguments, and it's clear they've let anchoring go too long. I agree with two-time PGA Tour winner Paul Goydos, who said, "Not only is the cat out of the bag, it's had kittens."

Changing the rule now is going to hurt the game, not help it. **TL**

Known as "The Golf Doctor," Charlie Epps has been one of Houston's most respected PGA golf professionals for more than 25 years and is a member of the Texas Golf Hall of Fame. He is Director of Golf at Redstone Golf Club, home of the PGA Tour's Shell Houston Open. Listen to Charlie 9-10 a.m. Saturday mornings on the Sporting News Network Golf Show, 1560 AM in Houston, 1310 AM in DFW, channel 127 Sirius and 242 XM. He can be reached at cepps@redstonegolfclub.com.



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