

# WOODS KEEN ON SOCIAL GOLFERS USING DIFFERENT EQUIPMENT FROM PROS

HE SAYS DISTANCE CONTROL ON TOUR IS KEY AS 'WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF PROPERTY WITH PROS HITTING CRAZY DRIVES'

Tiger Woods says "bifurcation" in the rules of golf to allow recreational players to use different equipment from professionals should be considered in the quest to curb ever-increasing hitting distance in the game.

Bifurcation is the division of something into two parts, in this case suggesting different equipment rules for amateurs and professionals.

"It's on the table whether we bifurcate or not," Woods said, noting that differing equipment rules could keep the game more enjoyable for the less-skilled while still limiting the distance professionals could hit the ball in competition.

"We want to keep the game enjoyable, we want to keep having more kids want to come play it," he said of the argument for allowing more forgiving clubs and balls designed to maximise distance for recreational use."

Critics of the bifurcation so-

lution argue that amateur golfers like knowing they use the same equipment as the pros. Different equipment standards could make transitioning from the amateur to professional ranks more difficult.

But with advances in fitness and equipment, professionals are hitting the ball further and further. Woods, who has watched – and helped inspire – the evolution over the course of his career believes it can't continue.

With some professionals hitting to distances of 300 metres with new equipment, many par-fours have been made redundant as they reach the green with one shot.

It is said that a decent amateur player can hit easily beyond 220 metres, with many registered drives at tournaments and corporate events averaging 260 metres.

Said Woods: "We've come a long way and what's been crazy is that I've been a part of all that."

"When I first started on Tour I beat Davis Love in a play-off (in 1996) and he was using a persimmon driver. If you could carry it 270 (yards) you took a lot of trouble out of play.

"Now guys are hitting hybrids and five-woods 270 in the air.

"The game has evolved and changed and we're running out of property trying to design courses that are 7,800 to 8,000 yards," Woods said.

Echoed Singapore Professional Golfers' Association president M. Murugiah: "It's true that there must be some control on distances, or else the skill factor is minimised. We want to see talent and skills displayed, not seeing players reach the par-fours in one. Only way to do that is with equipment checks."

Equipment isn't the only reason, he noted.

"When I came out it was just Vijay (Singh) and myself in the gyms and now it seems like everyone has their own trainer and physios and guys got bigger, stronger, faster, more athletic like all sports."

Woods was weighing in on the issue after the US Golf Association and the Royal & An-

cient, which oversee the world rules of golf, issued key findings of their Distance Insights Project this month.

The governing bodies said they want to break the "ever-increasing cycle of hitting dis-



tance" – which threatens to make some established courses obsolete and alters the balance of skills needed to be successful in the game.

Longer courses are also less environmentally friendly, and contribute to longer round times that turn off many, the investigation found.

"I've always said that the game of golf is fluid, it's moving," Woods said. "Part of the discussion going forward is do we bifurcate or not. It's going to be probably even well after my career and my playing days that we figure that out."

– AFP.

(Additional reporting by Godfrey Robert)

**'WHEN I FIRST STARTED ON TOUR I BEAT DAVIS LOVE IN A PLAY-OFF (IN 1996) AND HE WAS USING A PERSIMMON DRIVER. IF YOU COULD CARRY IT 270 (YARDS) YOU TOOK A LOT OF TROUBLE OUT OF PLAY. NOW GUYS ARE HITTING HYBRIDS AND FIVE-WOODS 270 IN THE AIR.'**

– TIGER WOODS (ABOVE)

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BY JEREMY THESEIRA

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