

Two Tips for the Price of One

A simple way to eliminate visual aids on your golf course.

by LARRY GILHULY



Small flagsticks in different colors can be used in the fairway to indicate whether the hole location is in the front, middle, or back.

OFF THE TOP of your head, can you name two of the worst visual plagues introduced into golf during the past three decades? No, the way golfers dress is not one of the answers. The prolific and accepted practice of using multicolored flags to indicate hole locations and 150-yard trees or posts do nothing to improve the golf course landscape and, in many cases, can be distracting. So how does one go about making a case to eliminate these eyesores while still providing the advantages they give to the players? Read on and see if you don't slap yourself on the side of the head for not thinking of the simple idea created by John Alexander, superintendent of Waverley Country Club in Portland, Oregon.

Before discussing the simple method to rid your course of multicolored flags and 150-yard trees, the reasons why these visual aids should be eliminated needs to be reviewed. While speed of play is usually used as the general reason why colored flags and 150-yard indicators are used, how about the negatives, including:

- They are not a part of the game. Agree or disagree, but golf requires the ability to think, feel, and observe before going through the physical motions of striking a golf ball. These visual aids

eliminate a portion of the game that is, thankfully, still practiced in Scotland, Ireland, and other countries.

- They require additional maintenance. The time required for trimming around one or two 150-yard trees per hole or around posts is minimal until it is multiplied by 14 or more and must be completed every one to two weeks. Shouldn't this valuable labor be used elsewhere?

- They open the maintenance staff up to unnecessary criticism. How many times have you been criticized for hole locations that border on the sadistic? In some cases, the criticism is justified; however, is it justified when the player blames a poor shot on the color of a flag? I don't think so!

- They can become severe hazards for shots barely off line. Golf is frustrating enough when poor shots end up in the drink or out of bounds. Why add to the misery by placing 150-yard visual aids only a few yards from the edge of a fairway? In the case of trees, there is nothing like the feeling of being stymied behind a tree when you are only two yards off line!

- They do not blend in well with the landscape. Let's face it, some visual aids are very visual and blend into the landscape about as well as a dog at a cat show.

For years, superintendents have used various methods to address these two topics, including whiffle balls, small flags, and other indicators on the flagstick. On the 150-yard indicator side, trees, posts, paint on cart paths, in-ground markers, and posts in the middle of the fairways have been used. The question remains, "Are these really necessary and isn't there a simple way to address these visual aids?" The answer is an emphatic yes, and here is how John Alexander made a seemingly complex problem very easy.

To start with, virtually every golf course uses small flagsticks on the practice green. The top portion that is used to pull the flagstick from the hole can be removed and a three- to four-inch spike added. These tops come in different colors, such as red, white, and blue. Why place a multicolored flag on the green when the hole location can be determined out on the fairway? Better yet, why not place these indicators in the middle of the fairway on the 150-yard indicator? This also eliminates the need for trees, posts, or other obtrusive markers. At Waverley Country Club, all the players need to do is look for the 150-yard marker with the small indicator to determine if the hole is in the front, middle, or back. The fairway mower operators and course setup personnel must move these markers; however, this is a small nuisance when compared to the normal use of multicolored flags and 150-yard trees or posts.

At this time, all indications are that these indicators are very well accepted. Can this idea work at your golf course to finally rid the greens and roughs of visual aids that impact play and maintenance? Give it a try and your players also may see the light of this simple idea!

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