



Seven generations of green committees put their mark on the golf course with various yardage markers. Not pictured are painted lines on the path, marked sprinkler heads, colored disks in the middle of the fairway, and pop-up markers at the edge of the fairway.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

How many yardage markers do you really need on the golf course?

by PATRICK J. GROSS

WE LIVE IN AN AGE when information is at our fingertips. Witness the growing popularity of the Internet, where you can have instant access to information on a wide variety of subjects with the click of a button. It seems the need for instant and accurate information is finding its way into our golf game with several gadgets and gizmos for marking yardage. There are red, white, and blue flags; whiffle balls on the flagstick; colored disks in the fairway; painted lines on the cart paths; shrubs or trees

at the edge of the fairway; pop-up markers; painted stakes; distances marked on the sprinklers to the front, middle, and back of the green; yardage books; binocular-type range finders; and the ultimate — global positioning system devices for golf carts. With so much information, you would think there is no excuse for a shot missing the green.

Despite such exact measuring devices, the handicap index for the average golfer in the United States remains between 16 and 17. He has trouble

enough keeping the ball on the fairway, let alone striking the ball a precise distance to the green. After watching professional golfers for so many years, the average golfer is now conditioned to search for the nearest sprinkler or yardage marker and pace off the distance to his ball. Instead of helping the average golfer, the yardage markers are slowing play and becoming a maintenance headache. The person changing holes now must carry three different sets of colored flags. Mower operators must avoid the many obstacles in their

way, including the cute little shrubs and the posts at the edge of the fairway. More hand labor is necessary to edge, trim, paint, replace, and maintain the variety of markers in the ground. Few people consider that the cute little 150-yard trees planted by the last green committee grow to become big 150-yard trees that need extra pruning and maintenance. Oddly enough, there is always money in the budget to purchase the trees but never any money for pruning and maintenance. Yet, green committees can't avoid the temptation of putting their mark on the golf course with yet another type of more accurate and more visible yardage marker. The results can be confusing.

How many times have you played a course and stood on the big white disk indicating 150 yards to the green and noticed the sprinkler next to it that reads 154 yards? Do you put a red flag or a blue flag on that 2,500 sq. ft. green that is only 10 yards deep? These are non-agronomic questions that more and more superintendents are facing because if a golf shot is missed, it's not the fault of the golfer. It's bad information! Dealing with these issues takes time away from the real business of golf course turf management.

What do the Rules of Golf say about yardage markers? Objects that have been placed on the course or marked



This 150-yard shrub looks out of place and blocks the shot from the bunker on this dogleg hole.

to indicate yardage are permissible. If these objects are man-made or they interfere with the lie of a player's ball or his stance or area of intended swing, the player is entitled to relief without penalty under the obstruction Rule (Rule 6-24). But if the interfering object is natural, such as a shrub or tree, relief

without penalty is not available. Finally, Rule 14-3 strictly prohibits the use of electronic distance-measuring devices, be they the hand-held or cart-mounted variety.

I guess gadgets and gizmos are a part of the game. It's the nature of golfers to want whatever advantage they can get to shave one or two strokes off their score. A good case can be made that yardage markers improve safety so that golfers don't hit into the group ahead of them. A simple yardage marker should be sufficient, as well as some common sense and good course etiquette. Traditionally, the game of golf should test the nerves and skill and judgement of the player in executing a proper golf shot. Part of that skill is judging distance. Yardage markers should not become eyesores or maintenance problems. The best advice is to keep it simple. One or two types of marking devices should be plenty. Let's speed up the game and simplify maintenance by eliminating the clutter of different yardage markers on the course. Information overload can be paralyzing for the pace of play as well as for the maintenance of the golf course.



A graveyard for 150-yard markers that are past their prime.

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