

IT'S YOUR HONOR

A Plea Against Instruments

To THE USGA:

I was somewhat surprised at reading a recent ruling by the USGA to the effect that the use of a plumb bob on the green to determine its slope did not violate the rules of golf. I wonder if the Rules Committee appreciated the implications of that ruling. The use of a plumb bob may be merely a comparatively unimportant and unobjectionable procedure. However, if a player may use a plumb bob on the green without violating the rules, he undoubtedly can use a spirit level for the same purpose. Instead of trying to size up a green as to how it rolls, he could easily pull a spirit level out of his bag and determine the roll exactly, so long as he did not touch the line of his putt.

Worse than that, if they can use plumb bobs and spirit levels on the green, there is no reason why Ben Hogan shouldn't carry along in his bag an army range finder so that he can focus it on the flag on any approach shot and determine to a fraction of an inch the exact distance to the cup instead of having to rely on faulty observation. It might have the advantage that he wouldn't then have to walk up a hundred yards towards the green to determine the distance, but I doubt if that compensation is adequate. Some other golfer who may be bothered by a wind could run up a telescoping rod with a wind gauge on top and get an exact measurement instead of a wild guess.

I haven't any doubt that, for a somewhat substantial consideration, Minneapolis Honeywell or IBM can put

out an instrument under which, by use of radar, a player can focus on the flag and have distance, altitude, wind direction and wind strength all computed and translated into a single answer—a No. 6 iron.

Once you say that the use of instruments of that kind is permitted under the rules, there is no limit to the extent to which a tournament player might go; particularly, the use of a range finder could become almost a necessity in tournament golf.

I realize that there is no specific statement in the rules of golf that a player cannot use a plumb bob on the green. However, the rules are not a criminal code, where anything that is not down in black and white is permitted on a golf course. There are certain traditions that are implicit in the game, and in addition, there are several rules, such as the "equity" rule, intended to preserve traditions as to proper play. While the wording of the paragraph on etiquette in the rules prohibits a player from talking while his opponent is addressing the ball, it doesn't prohibit him from blowing a whistle; however, I doubt if the Rules Committee would say that the lack of a specific prohibition made such a practice legal.

It seems to me that it is an important and essential tradition of the game that the roll of the green, the distance from the cup, the length of an approach shot to the green, and similar matters, should be determined by observation and judgment, not by packing along a flock of scientific instruments for those purposes.

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