

TEE ALIGNMENT: Don't Overlook It

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In reading through the various golf course trade magazines, a substantial amount of copy is spent on maintenance procedures, management programs, and various problems relating to construction, grasses, putting greens, drainage, etc. This is fine. However, this article will concentrate on one small but important aspect of tee construction and how it affects the play of the game and how we, as turf managers, may or may not improve this situation.

Golf is a unique sport. Every golf course is unique and different from the next. Each requires a vast assortment of shots to fit the particular situation of where the ball lies. Up to 14 different clubs may be used. Any number of shots are taken from fairways, bunkers, roughs and certainly any number of putts are taken on greens. However, there is one particular aspect of the game where all courses are the same — never less than 18 shots are played from the teeing grounds to complete 18 holes of play. Therefore, somewhere in the neighborhood of 20 to 25 per cent of all golf strokes during a par round originate from tees. It is somewhat surprising that with so many strokes played from tees, these important play areas can be as neglected as they are. In the usual scheme of priorities, the greens come first, the tees second, the fairways third, and bunkers and

roughs come in fourth and fifth. Even though high on the priority list, tees usually are one of the weaker turf areas on the golf course. They usually require much work to keep them in good playing condition.

In my travels as a USGA Green Section Agronomist, I see many different types, shapes and sizes of tees. I often find one important aspect of tees often overlooked; i.e., tee alignment. The direction the tee is pointing in relation to the designed direction of play for that particular hole is important to the golfer. *Figure 1* pictures a par-3 tee that is actually pointed directly at a clump of trees and not at the green. When setting up to play the shot, this misdirection can certainly affect the player's stance, alignment, and the end result of his shot from the tee.

Why Is This Alignment So Important?

The alignment of the tee whether good or bad can affect the play of the hole, especially for the higher handicapped golfers. They usually make up a majority of club players. Teaching golf professionals often state that one of the most common problems with higher handicapped golfers is aligning themselves correctly to play the golf shot. If they are properly aligned and they hit the shot

Figure 1. *The alignment of this tee can make the shot played to the green very interesting.*





Figure 2. Superintendent Jack McCarthy of the Old Westbury Golf and Country Club, Old Westbury, N.Y., contemplates what to do with this tee pointing play directly into the woods.

correctly, then the ball should go where initially aimed. If the golfer is poorly aligned, a properly hit shot simply has no chance of going where it was expected to go.

The better golfers, and perhaps this is one reason why they are better, usually realize the importance of alignment, and they make certain they are properly set before hitting the ball. The point is, tees can either make alignment for play easy or difficult; there seems to be a psychological correlation between the way the tee is pointed and how the golfer tends to line himself up with the edge of the tee and not necessarily the tee markers.

Why Poorly Aligned In The First Place?

Experience seems to indicate that improper tee alignments are really no one's intentional error. Golf course architects usually lay out a course with the center line for each hole running through the center line of the planned tees. Construction contractors usually intend to properly align the tees according to the architect's plans. Construction equipment operators usually try to do the job as directed by the contractor. Finally, the golf course superintendent usually inherits the end result — good or bad. So, by the time the tees are in play any number of situations could have caused the tee to be pointed improperly. Once constructed, it is usually difficult to justify completely rebuilding a misaligned tee, especially if the importance of tee alignment is not appreciated. If not initially constructed correctly, any realigning

work usually must wait until later when the tees are renovated for whatever reason.

Once a tee is misaligned, as in *Figure 2*, there really is nothing the golf course superintendent can do other than to try to square off the tee by cutting the grass in the desired angle of play, and by instructing his crew to properly align the tee markers when changing them during the week. This all helps. However, in a bad situation all that really can be done is, when the tee is renovated, enlarged, rebuilt, etc., to realign it according to the play of the hole. This is the point where the golf course superintendent has an excellent opportunity to actually do something to improve the play of the course. When tee renovation work is scheduled, be sure to realign the tee to the hole. Little extra effort is involved.

One point should be stressed. Square, rectangular, or free-formed tees all can be aligned to the hole. Shape and design really do not matter; it is the sense of direction that counts.

Figure 3 illustrates a common occurrence. A tee is being rebuilt, but is not being aligned with the hole. Rather it is being aligned with the ladies' tee in front. This is not to say that it was done intentionally, but that perhaps few people really realize the importance and the value of properly aligned tees. This, in a nutshell, is the purpose of this article . . . to show that tees, no matter what shape they take, can be so constructed as to aid the golfer as opposed to unintentionally making things more difficult and complicated.

If you wish to test this thesis, look at the direction of the divots taken from any of your tees and



Figure 3. When reconstructing a tee, don't underestimate the importance of tee alignment to the play of the hole.

see if they point out of play. If in the majority of cases they do, then the tee's alignment is actually adversely affecting the play of the hole and thus inadvertently penalizing the unknowing golfer. Therefore, when planning tee work, don't forget the tee's alignment.

A good tee should be firm underfoot . . . not hard or mushy; level . . . not uneven and bumpy;

adequately sized . . . so that good turf can be maintained on it; and finally, pointed in the desired direction of play. In practice, all of these points are essential for a good tee. Certainly the importance of a good-sized, firm and level tee is appreciated. But tee alignment, although perhaps a smaller point, can be a very important quality to an already struggling high handicap golfer.

Turfgrass Bibliography **NOW AVAILABLE**

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The bibliography was compiled over 10 years while the senior author was writing the textbook, *Turfgrass: Science and Culture*. It should be a valuable reference source for scholars of turfgrass culture, private and commercial turfgrass researchers, teachers, adult extension workers, students of

turfgrass culture and management, golf course superintendents, and other practicing professionals involved in the preparation of articles and talks concerning turfgrass culture and management.

A limited edition of 1,500 copies has been published by the Michigan State University Press, a nonprofit organization. Financial assistance in publishing the book was given by the O. J. Noer Research Foundation, United States Golf Association Green Section Research and Education Fund, Inc., The Michigan Golf Association, and The Michigan Seniors Golf Association. Turfgrass professionals interested in purchasing a copy should contact Lyle Blair, Michigan State University Press, Room 25, Manley Miles Bldg., 1405 So. Harrison Road, East Lansing, Mich. 48824. Price per copy is \$35.00 plus 45 cents shipping charges in the United States. Allow two weeks for delivery. Add 4 per cent tax for Michigan residents.