

# THE BEST TURF TIPS OF 1986 — PART II

## Helping The Blind To See

by JAMES T. SNOW

Director, Northeastern Region, USGA Green Section

*"There is ... a certain kind of fun to be got out of hitting a ball over a hill and running to the ridge top in order to see what chance has befallen the venture."*

John L. Low, 1903

**T**HOUGH DECRIED today as being old fashioned, unfair, and unsafe, blind golf shots are nevertheless an integral part of golf holes on many of the older, well-known golf courses in the United States and abroad. Before huge earth moving machines and multi-million dollar construction budgets, golf course architects had to make the best of the terrain they were given, and in the process a certain number of blind golf shots were inevitably created.

Taking nothing away from blind golf holes, for some are among the great holes of the game, blind shots admittedly are logistical problems in many instances. Not only can they contribute to slow play, more importantly they can be a source of safety concerns. Older golf courses with heavy play should be concerned about a group of golfers hitting into another group they can't see. The potential for an accident is always present under these circumstances.

Golf courses have dealt with blind golf holes in a variety of ways over the years, and yet many courses have never taken steps to ensure golfer safety. In 1986, the Montauk Downs Golf Course, in Montauk, New York, resolved a long-standing problem in this regard. For decades a lightly played private club

on the tip of eastern Long Island, Montauk Downs, was eventually purchased by the State of New York and has seen a tremendous increase in play in recent years. As play increased, concern about golfer safety on the blind seventh hole increased with it. Under the guidance of superintendent Hank Heddesheimer, the club built and installed a periscope and viewing platform on the seventh tee, all for the cost of a couple of hundred dollars worth of materials. With the periscope, golfers can now tee off without worrying about hitting into the group in front of them.

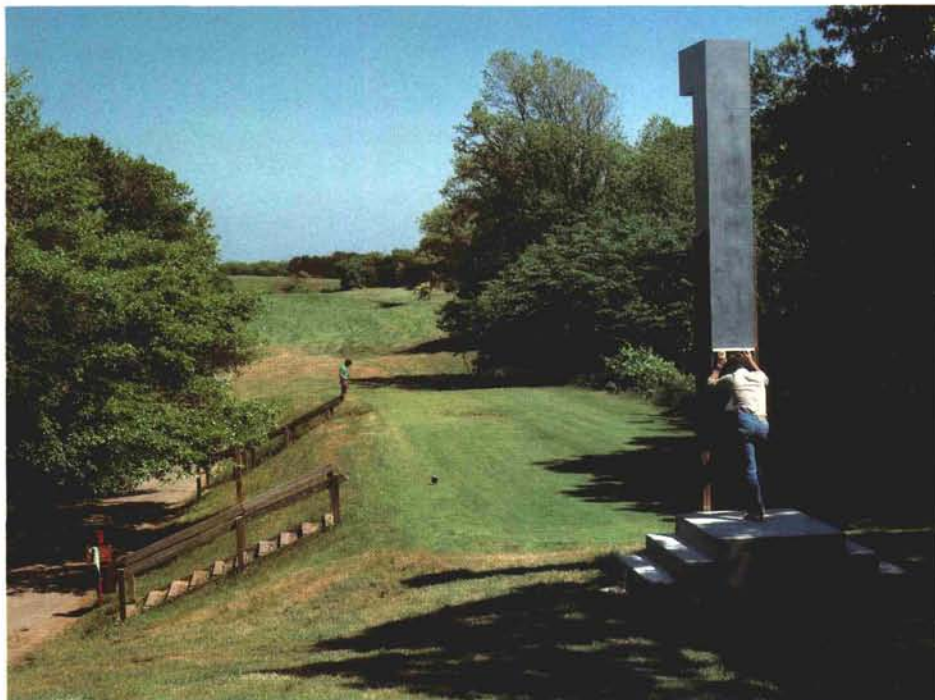
Other golf courses use other techniques for dealing with blind holes. The Sunken Meadow Golf Course, in Kings Park, New York, uses a simple elevated platform to provide just enough visibility of golfers already playing the hole. The tenth hole at the Taconic Golf Club, in Williamstown, Massachusetts, can be viewed from the tee by looking up at a polished steel mirror mounted in a large tree next to the tee. Where trees are not available, a mirror attached to a sturdy utility pole would certainly work just as well.

Providing visual evidence of golfers ahead is certainly desirable, but where this is not possible, a variety of audio signals are available. Bells or chimes are sometimes mounted in a convenient location just beyond the landing zone of the blind shot. As a group of golfers passes the installation, they are required to ring the bell to indicate to the following group that the area is now clear. Some courses actually use doorbell type buzzers, usually powered by battery, that send a signal from the fairway landing zone back to the tee.

Concerns about lost balls, slow play, and golfer safety on blind holes were probably never given much thought in the days of caddies, who were able to monitor shots and warn of golfers within range in blind shot situations. Today the golf cart, designated replace-

*In other days, caddies climbed the hill and indicated line of play. The fourth hole at Pine Valley, New Jersey.*





*(Top, left) Some put mirrors in trees.*

*(Top, right) Superintendent John Piccolo, at St. Catharines, rings bells.*

*(Above) At Montauk Downs, New York, Superintendent Hank Heddesheimer designed and built a periscope and viewing platform on the seventh hole.*

ment for the caddie, is sometimes the only available means of checking ahead on blind holes, requiring the golfer to take a quick trip to the top of the ridge and back again to play the shot. (According to one golf purist, this may be the only good use for carts on the golf course.) Perhaps the most drastic step that can be taken, and one that has been followed at many courses over the years, is to eliminate the visibility problem by way of a bulldozer.

In summary, a number of methods are available for making golfers aware of the presence of other golfers on blind holes. With the threat of lawsuits and rising insurance premiums a common occurrence on many courses, adopting one of these techniques for ensuring golfer safety would be worth considering.