

JUST HIT IT!

by Stanley J. Zontek

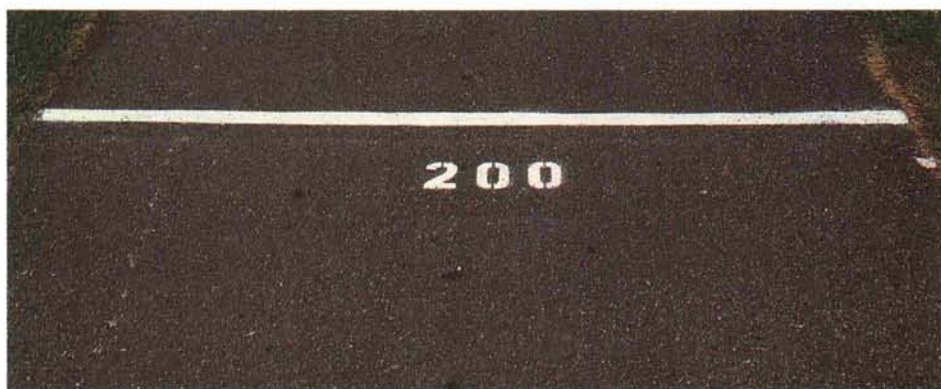
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GOLFERS have always looked for an edge. Years ago, having a good caddie who knew all the breaks on a green and all the distances to the green was a definite edge. The best caddies were always in demand. There was not the emphasis then, as there is today, on equipment and balls. In fact, at one time most all the molds that determined the number of dimples on a ball were made by one manufacturer, and all the balls basically enjoyed the same type of wound construction and the same balata covers. Caddies with local knowledge provided the only real winning edge.

All of this has changed. Golf magazines are full of ads proclaiming "the longest ball." It is difficult to keep up with ball construction, the number of dimples, types of coverings, and even the color and color combinations of balls. Golfers scurry to purchase balls that go farther, spin faster, land softer, and hold a green better than other brands. The same readers relish articles on equipment controversies, and spend vast amounts of money on state of the art clubs, shafts, grips, and grooves, which they feel give them the edge over their opponent and improve their score. The days of the caddie are gone. They have been almost totally replaced by the golf cart.

As today's golfer heads for the first tee, without the special knowledge of a caddie, he must rely on the golf course superintendent to determine yardages from tee to green or from points on the fairway to the green. Practically every golf course now uses some type of yardage indicator. Tee signs give the yardage, par, and handicap number for each hole. Some even have a picture of the hole and a marker indicating where the cup is located on that day. The modern golfer is better equipped than ever before, even without a caddie.

At one time, the USGA was opposed to yardage markers intended to indicate distances to the green from certain points. Even considering this opposition, many distinctive trees and ornamental shrubs were planted alongside fairways, usually 150 yards from the green. As time went by, the USGA



(Top left) "Just hit it" head is past the 222 head. Where does it stop?

(Top right) Nice yardage plate.

(Above) Yardage marker on cart path.

dropped its opposition to the markers, and since then many other techniques have been used. Some courses now have markers at 100, 150, and 200 yards from the green. They come in many forms:

As marker plates or domes on the center line of fairways.

As pipes, poles, or posts standing in the rough.

As painted lines on cart paths.

Some courses still rely on natural markers and course landmarks with diagrams of each hole on the scorecard showing individual yardages from those landmarks to the green.

Indicating distances to greens by inscribing numbers on individual sprinkler heads is becoming the most commonly used method of yardage indication. The

obvious attempt is to make it as easy as possible for the golfer to determine his distance from the green.

Of all the types of yardage indicators in use today, the type most discouraged agronomically is the use of living trees and shrubs planted specifically in the rough for yardage indication. Before the USGA dropped its opposition to marking the golf course, these natural markers were probably the most used technique. Unfortunately, special problems develop when natural markers are used.

By far the biggest problem with natural markers is as they grow, the once small shrub or tree quickly becomes large enough not only to adversely affect play, but also the mainte-

(Right) Simple, neat, visible, and effective yardage marker.

(Far right) Using a naturally occurring tree as a marker.

(Below) Yardage plates on sprinkler heads.

(Below middle) The smaller tree IS the marker.

(Below right) Domed fairway marker; looks like a big golf ball.



nance of the golf course. Remember, marker trees or shrubs are usually placed close enough to the fairway to be easily seen. As they grow, they can become a nuisance and an obstacle from which there is no relief under the Rules of Golf.

Living markers are also prone to special problems and needs. They must be pruned to keep them from growing too large, sprayed, and even protected with screens and mulch in the winter. Sometimes they die, and they must be replaced. Some types of plants are eaten by deer and rodents, creating another problem.

On the other hand, relief can be given from artificial markers. For many good reasons, then, it should be recognized that living markers can present special problems with course appearance, how it plays and is even maintained. It is inconsistent to have a yardage aid actually become a hindrance to play.

One of the arguments for using yardage aids is the concept that they will speed play. While this may be true, some yardage indicators are difficult to see, and can actually slow play. Golfers can spend precious time walking around looking for a yardage marker. Sometimes, it is almost like looking for a lost ball. The marker must be visible to be effective.

To serve their purpose, yardage markers must be accurate. The laser is the most accurate technique today. Once the yardage is accurately determined, be sure to move or remove old markers — especially trees and shrubs, which in some cases are in the wrong place. Do not keep them both; it only makes things more confusing, and again it slows play.

Finally, beware of fads. A good example of this is where marker balls are used on flagsticks. While they can be of assistance under certain circum-

stances or with certain golfers, indicators for hole location on greens just may not be needed on every green or under every circumstance. Most courses no longer use this system.

A number of golf clubs object to the overuse of artificial yardage markers. They rely on existing landmarks to determine distances. A prominent tree, the beginning or end of a sand bunker, for example, are all appropriate yardage indicators. It depends on what the golfers want, and they should be the final judge.

Marking yardages on a golf course in one fashion or another seems to be here to stay. The demise of the caddie and the increasing use of the powered golf cart all but guarantee this. Regardless of the technique, remember that knowing the yardage to the green is only a small part of the game. The important part is actually hitting the golf ball. As the old adage says, when in doubt, "Just hit it!"