

Red Flags Unsatisfactory to Mark Golf Holes

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One cannot judge accurately the distance of a bright red object from the observer. The explanation of this fact lies both in physical optics and in physiological psychology. But the fact itself, rather than its explanation, is the important thing to the greens' committeeman.

Every microscopist knows that under the microscope a delicate object stained with bright red dye does not show a sharp, clearly defined edge. The edge appears *geschwommend*, as the Germans say. But another illustration shows the point better. Take two colored cards of, say, postcard size, one bright red and the other green, the prevalent background on golf courses. Hold the red card in your hand 18 inches in front of the eyes of the person upon whom you are experimenting, and with its face at right angles to his line of vision. Have him squint his eyes until his vision is just a bit hazy, to correspond with the atmospheric effect in distant vision. Then ask him to place the edge of his green card exactly upon the edge of your red card, and note how he will fail. Reverse the experiment; giving him the red card while you hold the green, and note the same result. Some persons will place their card short, and some at too great a distance, but almost no one will get it exactly right; and if they do get it right, it will probably be because they look at the fingers or hands rather than the cards. The human eye does not accurately observe the distance away in case of a red object against a green background. This is just as true of a red flag on a golf green as it is of a red card in the experiment quoted.*

The point is one of some practical importance. In case of an open green on level ground, distance is judged largely by the flag, there being no bunkers or traps or hills to aid the observer in estimating distance. On a rolling course, in many lies, the only visible object by which to judge the position of the hole will be the flag. Often in case of a bunkered hole the flag will be the only thing by which to tell how far beyond the bunker the hole itself lies. In all these cases a red flag will not aid the player to form an accurate estimate of distance; indeed, it will tend positively to mislead him; it sets a trap for him, tending to fool him.

A lemon-yellow or a bright-orange flag can be seen at a greater distance than a red flag, for red at a distance tends to be absorbed into the background, as witness the red coats of the British soldiers of the previous generation. But, more important than its visibility at a distance, a yellow or bright-orange flag does not mislead a player in his judgment of distance, as does a bright-red flag.

The writer has never seen any but white flags and red flags in use upon a golf course, except on the course of the Columbia Country Club in Washington, at some of whose holes yellow flags are used. Red flags, however, are used at some holes at Columbia.

While writing of judgment of distance, it is worth while to call attention to the care Dr. Harban has given to this matter in planning the Columbia course. In numerous instances he has provided for the player making his approach shot, a view of sand near the green against a green background (the sand of a trap against the green of a bunker, or a slash of

* Quoted by permission from conversation with Prof. E. S. Jones, of Oberlin College.

sand on the face of a mound), and in at least one case he has provided, just in front of the green and just behind it, such a sand slash on the face of a green mound. At this latter hole one judges distance with a confidence that must do much to steady the player in his approach shot. The ordinary golf club may perhaps despair of rivaling Columbia for condition of turf and many other things; but such refinements as color of flags and other aids to estimating distance do not involve construction difficulties or expense and are within the reach of the weakest clubs.

How We Controlled *Poa Annua* at Old Elm

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Our eighteen greens at the Old Elm Club were constructed upon scientific plans as to drainage, contours, proportions of soils, fertilizers, etc. This was ten years ago. The greens cost much money and a great deal of personal effort. They were a valuable possession owned by one hundred and fifty members of the Old Elm Club who had contributed their money for the purpose of having an almost semi-private golf course where the majority of them over fifty years of age could play without being interrupted, and enjoy the fruits of their labors. Most of us had passed that period in life where we had any time to waste anywhere trailing behind foursomes of juniors, women and children, and tournaments. Now, these putting greens these men paid for, as they did for the clubhouse, the fairways, the traps, the drainage, the locker room, and everything else connected with the Club; but the putting greens were given to those in charge of them in trust to care for. They had cost a great deal of money, as above stated; they were delicate; they had to be nourished, watered and cared for because they were young and delicate. A putting green, we knew, was a place for grass, and a certain kind of grass. If we had wanted a weed bed we could have gotten that easily; but we wanted a putting green of grass only. Therefore, we did the only things that could be done so far as we knew, namely, to see that the grass that was put into the putting greens remained there and was added to, if needed, from time to time, and that anything which came into the putting greens and which should not be there was removed.

We have never regarded *Poa annua* as being any different from any other weed so far as being an enemy to our thoroughbred putting greens was concerned. We would not have taken a sunflower two feet high out of the putting green any more quickly than we would have removed a bunch of *Poa annua* the size of a dollar. Anything that was not our original sowing (which by the way was mixed bents and fescues), we would have taken out. We were not conscious of having accomplished anything of great importance until our attention was called to the fact that we were the only club known that had kept *Poa annua* out of our putting greens. *Poa annua* is all about us in every direction. All of the golf courses in our locality have it, on from one-half to all of their greens. Some of the courses have nothing but *Poa annua* on their putting greens, and of course have relatively poor greens for a month or two at least. It is