

# Professional Cup-Hole Cutting

By Michael Hoffman

The most valuable areas of a golf course are the greens and any activity that occurs on the greens should be the most meticulous, cautious and professional activity that transpires anywhere on the golf course. I have developed the following procedures over the years to help me and others do a thoroughly professional job of cup hole cutting and cup hole painting for daily operations and for tournaments.

## CUP HOLE CUTTING PROCEDURES

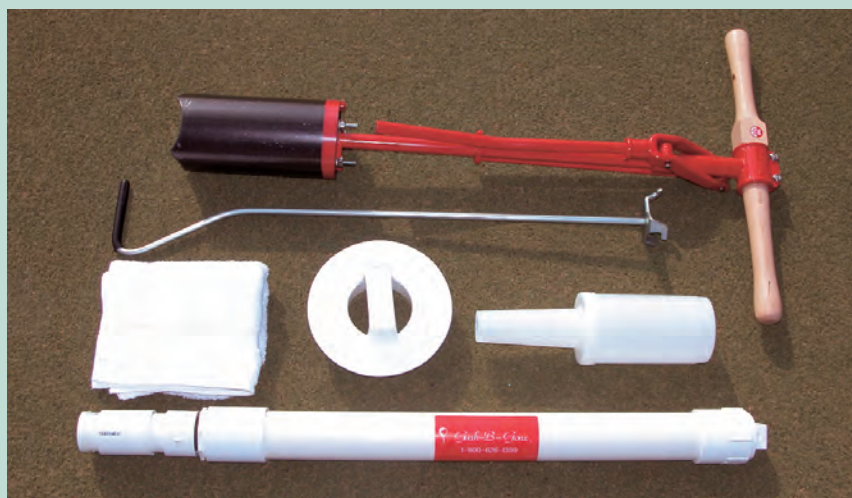
Determine the hole position either from a designated pin sheet or by using an approved rotation system as designated by your club. When using a pin sheet, pace the depth measurement from the front edge of the green and mark that dimension with your tool/sand container and then pace off any left or right distances.

For example a pin location designated 14/8 would be 14 paces from the front edge and 8 paces from the left or right edge as indicated on the pin sheet. Single numbers mean the location is in the center of the green.

Now that the position is determined, if you are using a twist-in or rotating-cut hole-cutter, hold the cup cutter 18-24 inches above the green and release it. I have found this produces a cleaner hole edge than just placing the cutter edge on the surface and twisting it in. Using this drop-release method, the cutter will generally penetrate the green surface 1.5-2 inches. Remove the cup cutter from the hole.

Release the grass plug into the container; wipe off the outside of the cutting cylinder with a towel. Carefully insert the cup cutter into the new starter hole. Bring the cup cutter to a perpendicular position by centering the level. Rotate the cup cutter left and right, exerting a downward pressure until the standard 7-inch depth is reached.

Please note that this should be done slowly while checking the level during the process. There are various devices



Items required for proper cup hole cutting – From the top: inside-bevel cup-cutter with level, cup puller, clean towel, cup setter, water bottle and a uni-par sand dispenser. Not pictured: a ball mark repair tool. Photo by Joel Jackson.

## Recommended General Procedures

- Sharpen cup hole cutter weekly
- Carry the hole cutter in the cab of the utility vehicle and/or with a rubber mat to protect the cutting edge
- Use a container that is "edgeless" on the bottom to carry tools, sand, water, etc.
- Always wipe the bottom of the container before you arrive on the green
- If possible carry some green sand or purchase a ball mark tool that dispenses green Uni Par sand

and stops that can be used to indicate when the hole has reached the required depth when using the two-plug cutting method. I have found that by measuring 7 inches from the top of the scallops on the cutting shell and then painting a mark or applying a high visibility tape just above that mark gives me a good guide to achieve the proper regulation 7-inch overall depth.

Now slowly twist the cup cutter while at the same time lifting up on the handle to remove the cup cutter and plug from the hole. It is important to do this slowly to prevent soil from falling out of the cut cutter cylinder. If soil does fall out, carefully replace the cup cutter back into the hole. Once the cutter is all the way down in the hole, lift it up 1-2 inches and

## The operator should have the following items when cutting cups:

- Pin sheet with hole locations
- Cup hole cutter with centering level
- Small water container
- Cut setter tool
- Small amount of sand
- Small clean towel
- Cup puller tool
- Ball mark repair tool
- Small flashlight
- Edgeless 5 gallon container

then gently push down recapture the soil that fell out. Again, slowly remove the cup cutter with a slight left/right rotation. Place the cup cutter into the container.

Clean off the inside and outside of the cup. With both hands insert it into the new hole rotating it left to right until the top of the cup is 2 inches above the green. With the water bottle apply a small amount of water around the outside of the cup. This will help keep the edge from drying out during the day. Also apply a small amount of water inside the cup. This can remove any residue that was not wiped out. It also helps clean the ferrule hole of any sand, dirt or debris that may cause the flagpole to bind. If you want to pre-check the flagpole angle to make sure its perpendicular and not leaning before using

the cup setter, place the flagpole in the cup while it is still elevated slightly above the green. If it is leaning slightly, move it to perpendicular while in the cup and gently compress the area around the cup. Remove the flagpole and insert the cup-setter tool.

Insert the cup setting tool into the cup. Push down firmly until the rim of the cup setter touches the surface of the green. It is important not to force the cup setter. If you do not achieve full depth and surface contact with firm foot pressure, the hole was not cut to the proper depth. Remove the cup setter and cup and repeat Step 2. Remove the cup setter with a straight upward pulling motion. Do not twist or rotate the cup setter when removing it as it can damage the edge of the hole. Replace the flagpole and check to make sure it slides easily in and out of the ferrule.

To replace the plug in the old hole, clean off the cutting cylinder before you insert it into the hole. Place the cylinder into the hole making sure it is all the way to the bottom of the hole. Release the soil plug while keeping the cylinder contacting the bottom of the hole. Once the

soil plug is released, remove the cylinder from the hole. To ensure the soil plug is all the way to the bottom of the hole – reinsert and repeat the above steps. This helps prevent any possibility of the soil plug from sinking.

Remove any debris from the grass plug. Measure the thickness of the grass plug with your thumb. Use your thumb mark to measure how much, if any, soil you need to remove or add to achieve a level plug replacement. Gently insert the grass plug into the hole at a slightly tilted angle pushing in the front edge of the plug first towards the back edge that is inside of the hole. Push down on the plug so that it is level with the surrounding surface.

Use a ball mark repair tool to mesh the edges of the plug with the green's surface by inserting the tool about 1/2 inch in from the edge of the plug and twisting the tool outward. Sprinkle a small amount of water over and around the plug. This will help promote faster regrowth.

Finally, with very slight pressure tamp the plug with your foot. Sometimes a very slight twisting motion with your foot

will help mesh the edges. The tightness of the plug is critical. Test the surface around the plug for firmness. It should feel the same as the plug.

### HOW TO PAINT CUP HOLES FOR TOURNAMENTS

The operator should have the same items utilized in daily cup hole cutting with the addition of the following items:

- Spray paint hole cover device
- Two cans of white hole paint
- Small cloth 8 x 8 inches
- A damp 24 x 24-inch overspray towel with a 5-inch diameter hole cut in the center

After the cup hole has been cut following the previous guidelines, the following procedures are to be used when painting the cup hole.

Prior to setting the cup with the cup setter, insert a small rag into the cup to cover the bottom of the cup.

Set the cup with the cup setter. Place the spray paint hole cover device into the cup

Place the damp 24" overspray towel around the cup hole cover device

Insert the spray paint can nozzle



## Rules of Thumb

*Left: Use your thumb to measure the remaining depth of the soil plug to the surface.*

*Below: By checking the "thumb length" on the side of the grass plug, you can judge how much soil to remove so the plug will fit properly. Photo by Joel Jackson.*





Mike Hoffman demonstrates an easy way to check and adjust the straightness of the flag-pole by inserting it in the cup before it is set to its final depth. Photo by Joel Jackson.

into the hole cover device

Begin to spray by rotating the paint can 360 degrees clockwise. It is important to note the starting point for the spray pattern to avoid overlapping the paint. One 360 degree rotation is sufficient.

Remove the overspray towel.  
Remove the hole cover device and place it

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on the towel to avoid getting any drips on the green.

Rotate the small cloth that is in the cup so that it collects any paint that is on the cup interior. Remove the cloth from the hole

Following these procedures will give you better results in your hole cutting and painting operation.

We have a 5-6 minute video available that demonstrates the entire hole-cutting procedure step by step, from pacing off the hole location to cutting the hole and replacing the plug as noted in this article, as well as some other helpful tips to improve your hole cutting process. The video is available in English or Spanish. Email: [flachoff@cs.com](mailto:flachoff@cs.com) or call 352-223-1900.

**Editor's Note:** *Mike Hoffman has many years experience in the golf course industry in golf operations and maintenance. He is currently the golf course maintenance service manager at the Isleworth G&CC. Hoffman is responsible for daily course set up, detailing and quality control. Hoffman has authored articles for various golf publications and holds several patents for golf course tools including the AccuPro cup cutter and a cup cutting level.*



A moist clean towel with a 3 inch hole cut in the center catches any overspray when painting tournament cups. A small cloth in the bottom of cup during painting is used to clean the sides of the cup as needed. Photo by Joel Jackson.



## Sanding Tool

The UniPar sanding tool easily and quickly dispenses green sand to fill ball marks on the green. Using the UniPar tool like a pepper mill a light application of green sand can be made to blend in the edges of the replaced plug. Photos by Joel Jackson.

