

Hole Location Sheets...Hassle or Helpful?

By JEFF GIRARD

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Cold, snowy winter days can be very beneficial for those of us in the golf course industry. While most are already planning for and looking ahead to the upcoming season, it is also important to look back on the past year and evaluate. What worked or didn't work? Did we try something new? Should we try something different? These questions can be asked of a wide array of topics, products, services and techniques. It's also a time to share these ideas and thoughts with others so that someone else may find some benefit from even just one thought or idea that they may want to implement in their plan for the upcoming season or years to come. The purpose of this article is to touch upon one aspect of our course set-up practices that we utilize on a daily basis that I feel provides a better overall product for our golfers and our golf course: hole location sheets.

Now if you've read this far, you might be saying to yourself, "I don't want to deal with those...they're a real hassle." But truth be told, they really are quite the opposite...a real help. I was first truly introduced to hole location sheets while working at Baltusrol Golf Club in New Jersey where we used them on a daily basis. No, they weren't a brand new concept to me. I had seen them used for tournaments and special events... special occasions that provided a nice little added touch to that day. But utilizing them on an every day basis seemed a bit over the top.

I had always thought that distinguishing between front, middle, and back with different colored flags for the golfers seemed adequate. Or placing the hole in one of six designated and numbered areas on the green for that day was another. But providing golfers with the depth from the front of the green and number of paces from the left or right edge of the green? To use these sheets everyday seemed like overkill. However, as my first season progressed at Baltusrol, I began seeing the benefits. A few of those that I will touch upon are time-saving, distributing wear

tolerance across the putting surface, benefits to the players and a couple of suggestions on how to put together your own hole location sheet portfolio.

When utilizing a hole location sheet, you are actually saving time for the person changing holes. All the person must do is look at the sheet for the hole they are

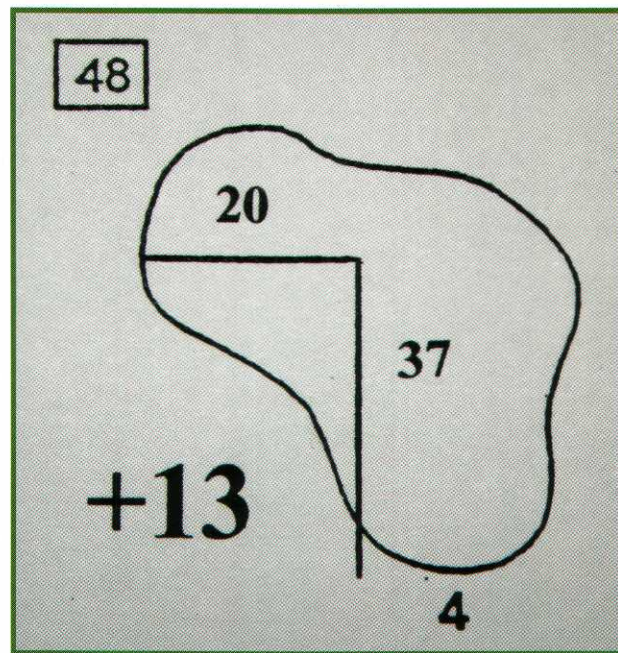
the putting surface endures in the over-used areas day in and day out. Taking the time to develop a hole location sheet system will help you spread out the locations of the holes on a daily basis and spread the amount of wear more uniformly across the putting surface. And, golfers enjoy using them.

Here at Windsong, I would estimate that between 70-80% of people use them on a daily basis. And it isn't just the low-handicappers that like them. Even the guy that's a 20-handicap, though he thinks he's a 12, likes to know that he has 184 yards to the hole which is a perfect 6-iron for him (actually a 4-iron). Next to each hole on the sheet is a number, designated with a (+ or -) telling you how many yards from the center of the green the hole is located. By utilizing the yardages on the sprinkler heads in the fairways and pacing your ball off, you can get a yardage to the middle of the green. Now just add or subtract the number on the hole location sheet and you have a yardage to the flagstick. In addition, if golfers don't have to waste time trying to figure out where the flag is located on the green, whether it's front, middle or back...and

how far back, it probably helps speed up the pace of play a bit.

The final idea I want to briefly touch upon is to offer a few suggestions on putting together your own hole location sheets. This all depends on how much time you are willing to put into it. In our first year of operation, we traditionally did not change holes on Mondays. So as I went around doing other tasks, I would select six new locations for the coming week. I still used the idea of breaking the green down into six sections (front left and right, middle left and right, and back left and right). I picked one of each six off each green to be used for that week. I did this each Monday for six or seven weeks until I had an adequate amount of hole location sheets (30-40). This worked fine

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about to change, walk up to the front of the green, pace it off, and you've found your location for the day. Oftentimes, the person spends a good deal of time wandering around looking for a good spot for that day. This still holds true even if you've already broken it down for him/her to be looking in the front, middle or back of the green.

Another area of interest to consider is that people tend to gravitate to the same places or locations over and over, and I can speak from experience on that. Tucking the hole behind the left greenside bunker or close to the water on the right is always more intriguing than an easier, more friendly location closer to the middle of the green. This is definitely the case if you have the same person change holes on a daily basis. By using hole location sheets, you increase the amount of wear

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for year one, but I still noticed some repetition in some of the locations. As I mentioned previously, people tend to gravitate to the same areas. So the following winter I took it a step further and picked 48 new locations for each green (8 FL, 8 FR, 8 ML, 8 MR, 8 BL, 8 BR) off the top of my head. Now having been basically the only person changing holes on the course, I became very familiar with what would and wouldn't work on each green. Having already been pacing off each green on a daily basis, I knew areas and paces that were fair and unfair. This gave me 48 new locations per green that were all different and probably at a minimum of 5-10 feet from the next closest one. By, in a way, randomly picking hole locations, I was able spread the wear and traffic throughout the green. In

addition, I uncovered a lot of locations that I would have never looked at in the past. Many of which were very good...tough but fair.

If creating a hole location sheet portfolio sounds like a lot of work, it is. But I also worked on it primarily during the

sheet #1 will have two months to heal up until I am using that sheet again. The golf shop also has a binder with the same numbered sheets. All I have to do each morning is call them up, give them the sheet number for the day, and they make the copies and place them in the starter's box on the first tee.

In the end, when looking at all the benefits that hole location sheets can provide, the most beneficial is probably for the golfers experience. There are so many things, large and small, that we all try to do to improve the golfers experience on our courses. While many of the things we do to satisfy the golfers

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winter. I took the idea a lot further than I had initially planned, but it paid off in the end. I now have a three-ringed binder with 48 hole location sheets numbered 1-48. With that being said, if I use six sheets per week, it will take me eight weeks until I have completely cycled through the portfolio. That means those holes I cut using

often times take away from what we are trying to achieve, hole location sheets are one item that can better their experience and help us maintain and improve on what we are trying to do...provide better conditions and a better golf course for our players.

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