



The First Hole Cutter – Still on Display at Royal Musselburgh

# Tin cup

Tim Webb provides a fascinating view on the development of the holecup

**As the UK hosts two of golf's greatest competitions this year: the recent Open Championship, on the Old Course at St Andrews for the 28th time, and the Ryder Cup for the first time in Wales, questions and commentary abound.**

Amid the hoopla and gossip—talk about Tiger's tumble, speculation about whether an English man could work some wonders, and the strut toward Celtic Manor—an unobtrusive, modest pair of contributors are helping stage the competition. I'm talking about the flagsticks and the cups. They do their best work if the wind is up, but whatever the conditions, the flagsticks bend with the breeze, and the cups will shine bright, their luminous white liners visible not just to the players on the greens but to galleries and TV audiences world-wide. Big deal, you say—it's a flagstick right; it's a cup, correct?

The golf cup is younger than the game—the requirement for a cup is just over one hundred years old, while the game is five times that age. The original cups were installed simply to keep the hole from growing unsportingly large. It was long the custom for players to grab a handful of sand out of the hole when they retrieved their balls and use it to build a little cone-shaped tee on the driving ground. The first recorded shaped hole was at Musselburgh, near Edinburgh, in 1829, cut with a drain pipe and measuring 4 1/4 inches in diameter. In 1891, the R & A standardized that as the legal cup size in its official rules. Golf holes all over the world today measure 4 1/4 inches (even in metric countries, where that is approximately

108mm), and they have been this size since 1891.

The reason for that precise diameter is that Royal Musselburgh Golf Club had invented, in 1829, the first known hole-cutter. It is still in existence and on display at the club, and had become the accepted norm at clubs in that part of Scotland. Musselburgh pioneered the cleanly cut, standard-sized hole, by using a handy object—a piece of old drainage pipe which coincidentally still today measures 108mm. Try measuring the soil pipe that comes from your toilet and you will see what I mean.

Gordon Moir is the Director of Greenkeeping for the St Andrews Links Trust. In that role Moir is responsible for safeguarding a legacy that extends from the Old Course, the most venerated of golf courses worldwide, to the Castle Course, a brilliant example of modern golf design executed by a son of Scotland, David McLay Kidd. "At St Andrews Links," Moir says, "we have found the Tacit holecups to be long lasting—especially the liners, which are excellent. They stand up well to windy conditions," he confirms, "and help the hole keep its shape." Did Gordon have a crystal ball in anticipating the conditions the players at this year's Open would encounter when on the second day of play when play was stopped as balls shivered and were blown off the immaculately prepared greens. Why else (perhaps a few years of local knowledge maybe) would he ensure that the Old Lady was adorned with cups and pins that just wouldn't blow out and stood to attention in conditions that the Authorities regarded as unplayable?

Twenty years ago a new type cup and ferrule was developed by Richard Webb of Tacit. An Anti Swivel Ferrule/Holecup combination that has now been adopted by the majority of courses throughout Great Britain and Ireland. Indeed it is so good that some companies have taken the idea and produced anti swivel systems of their own.

Tacit in recent years took another leap forward with the introduction of the Sub Cap to the central Ferrule bore, thus reducing holecup sinkage and reducing substantially the amount the ferrule will wear.

**“Try measuring the soil pipe that comes from your toilet and you will see what I mean”**

**Tim Webb**

**How did they achieve this?**

Imagine the ferrule on the bottom of flagstick to be a pebble in a stream. Imagine the holecup to be a rock pocket that has collected the pebble, as the pebble turns within the hole, both the pebble wears smaller, whilst the hole wears bigger. How to stop the wear? Simple, stop the movement.

This is where the splines on the underside of the ferrule come into their own. Although unobtrusive, the splines instantly locate in the corresponding slots in the holecup and stop the flagstick from rotating within the holecup. Instead of the flagpins needing to be replaced annually, there is now a two year renew cycle.

Adding Tacit's sub cap to this scenario, could lead to a three or four year renew cycle, as the wear



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on the ferrule and holecup is slowed even more.

Without this excessive wear brought about by ferrule rotation, the flagstick stays upright longer, with the chances of the flagstick blowing out of the holecup in strong winds being substantially reduced.

**Why add a Sub Cap?**

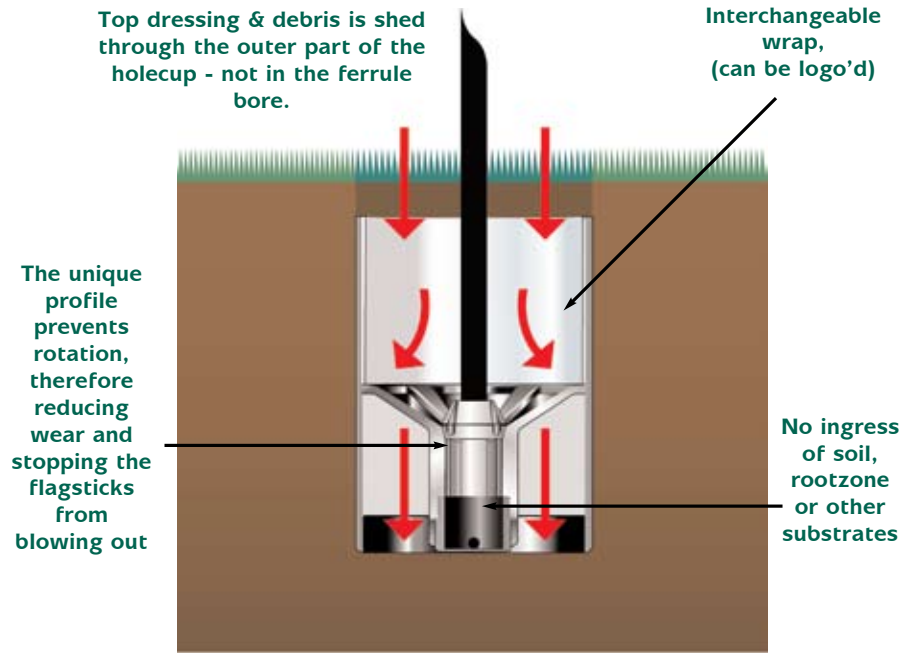
The only way flagsticks will blow out of the hole or wear excessively, is if the ferrule is not locating correctly in the hole. On a busy course, the flagstick is relocated every 10 to 15 minutes throughout the day; the holecup is constantly hammered deeper and deeper into the hole. Originally set to the R & A recommended 1" depth; the holecup can end up 2" below the surface after a few days, especially in U.S.G.A. specification sand greens. The sub cap increases the ambient surface area by over 300%, allowing the holecup to effectively float in the green.

The ingress of soil up the middle of the holecup is completely stopped but the cup can still be bedded solidly into the root zone. The flagstick and ferrule can then sit in the holecup in perfect harmony and work together at their optimum in a rootzone free world, because the ferrule / holecup combination is grit free the ferrule and holecup do not jam and therefore the holecup is not pulled out of the ground when the flag is being tended.

**But what about the cup itself?**

Tacit's holecup is unique in that it works opposite to all the other cups on the market, while they have been designed to move all the debris and topdressing down the center bore causing all sorts of problems with wear and "ferrule jam" the Tacit holecup is designed to shed all that unrequited rubbish through the outer windows keeping the central bore clear. Constructed and machined to exact tolerances in the UK by skilled time served craftsmen from Marine Aluminum, the leading edges being given a taper both top and bottom allowing for ease of setting and extraction of the cup whilst maintaining an exact 4 1/4 " diameter to the body of the cup.

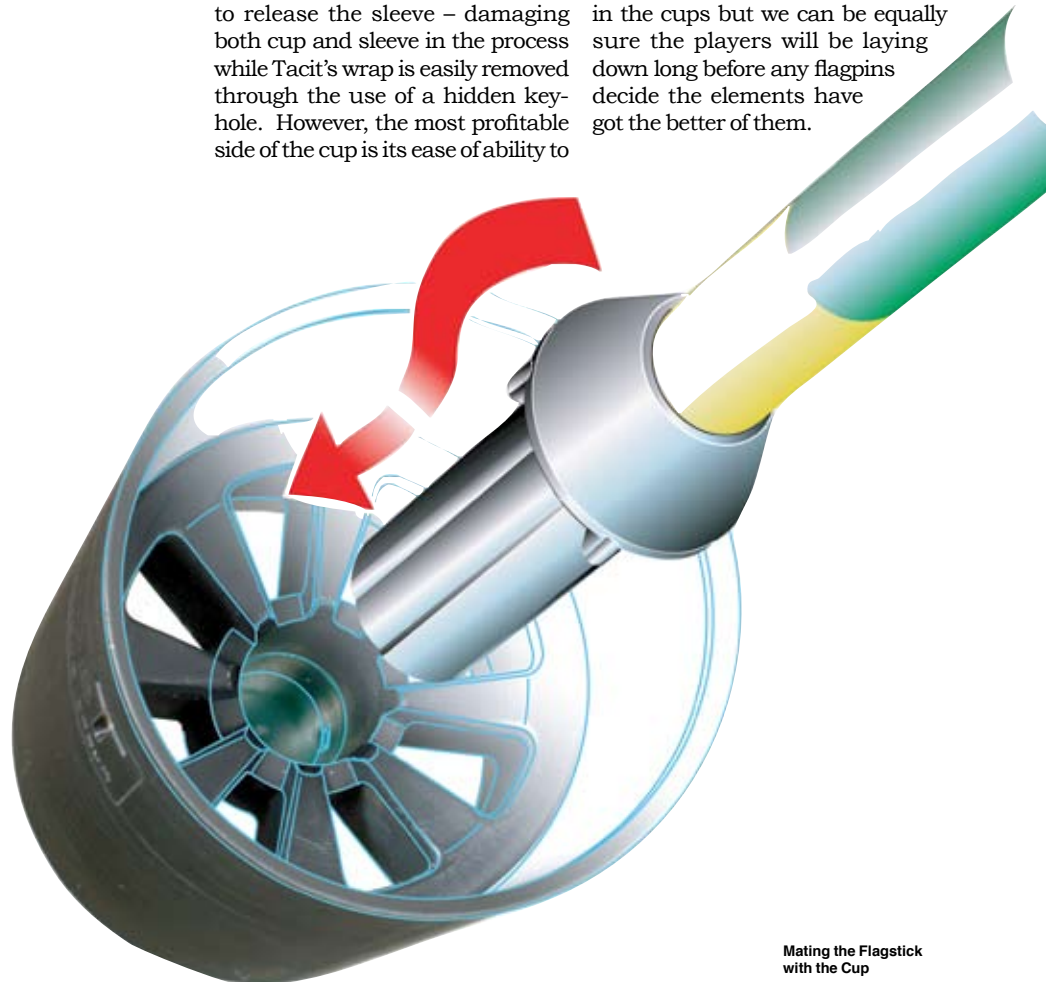
But the "piaster resistance" must be the wrap contained in the cup. For years green keepers have had to struggle with damaged and chipped paint coming off the cups. With the introduction of a PVC wrap all these problems have been instantly eradicated. The cup stays bright and white month after month,



and when it needs changing it is replaced cheaply and in seconds and because it is constructed of a very fine surfaced PVC, dirt and dust are not easily engrained unlike other similar sleeved designs. These other sleeved designs also have an inherent weakness in that a screwdriver has to be pushed down the front edge of the cup in order to release the sleeve – damaging both cup and sleeve in the process while Tacit's wrap is easily removed through the use of a hidden key-hole. However, the most profitable side of the cup is its ease of ability to

be logoed or branded. This can be done cheaply and easily while flat either locally or ordered in specially, the advertising space can then be sold over and over.

As we sit back and listen to the dulcet tones of Peter Allis at this Years Ryder Cup at Celtic Manor we can be pretty sure we wont be seeing any Union Jacks or European flags in the cups but we can be equally sure the players will be laying down long before any flagpins decide the elements have got the better of them.



Mating the Flagstick with the Cup