

Dressing up your cups — for the golfer and TV

By SCOTT E. NIVEN, CGCS

GREENWICH, Conn. — Golf courses today are designed and maintained in a way that maximizes aesthetic qualities by creating near-perfect definition of all features. A lot of time, effort and money goes into producing this manicured "look," which gives a golf course the professional, appealing, sharp definition that shows a golfer exactly where to play his shots.

Until now, we have stopped just short of doing everything possible in providing

the ultimate in visual definition. The one location we can still improve, ironically, is the most important in all of golf: the hole itself. Even if we frequently apply white paint to the metal cup, the one inch of exposed brownish soil just below the surface is still difficult to see from most areas of any golf green — so much so, the USGA and the PGA Tour will attempt to paint this exposed soil white so TV viewers can see the hole better while watching at home. Most amateur golfers do experience this luxury and instead

must putt to a soil-edged hole they can't see very well. Unfortunately, regular painting of the soil edge is not practical, for it's very difficult and time-consuming.

Thanks to a clever inventor from Texas, we now have a patented device called the U.S. Golf Hole TARGET that simulates white paint on the edge of the hole. This white plastic collar covers the exposed soil above the metal cup to a level of 1/4-inch below the surface of the green and creates a clean bright white



Before and...



... after the treatment.

and highly visible "Target". Some of the other less obvious benefits of this collar, besides a reduced need to tend the pin, are preservation of the perfect 4 1/4-inch diameter of the hole which has been shown to expand and contract during dry or wet weather; elimination of the flaking soil particles on high sand-based greens; and a reduction in desiccation around the top of the hole. U.S. Golf Hole TARGETs are very easy to install and, since they are reusable, need only be replaced in approximate two-week intervals. The cost averages less than two cents per golfer round.

The biggest criticism I've heard of this new invention is the fear it might cause lip-outs. This scenario has been explored in great detail via a lip-out study simulating more than 4,000 putts under all types of weather conditions. The study showed the difference in lip-outs with or without the TARGET is statistically insignificant.

The position of the TARGET, at 1/4-inch below the surface of the green, was not chosen arbitrarily. The laws of physics were used to prove that once the centroid of an object, with the mass and weight of a golf ball, falls 1/4-inch into the hole, only gravity can then affect the ultimate result of it's falling to the bottom of the cup.

At this point in time, the U.S.G.A has not yet approved or declared the TARGET in conflict with the Rules of Golf. That decision will have to wait until 1996, when the rules can be improved in their definition of what constitutes a metal cup liner versus a plastic collar. Until then, under the present Rules of Golf, the definition of "hole" states, "If a lining is used, it shall be sunk at least one-inch below the surface of the putting surface unless the soil condition makes it impracticable to do so." Surely, the exposed earth, subject to dehydration, erosion and instability is impracticable, which by definition means "hard to manage, difficult to maintain." With this interpretation, use of the TARGET for regular play at any golf club is perfectly legal.

We've used the TARGET successfully every day at our club for more than one year, as have many other golf courses, and I'd predict that it is only a matter of time until the U.S.G.A. and the PGA Tour make the TARGET standard equipment for their special events.

So, if you want to please your members and give your course the ultimate in visual detail, don't stop short of the hole. After all, in golf, what's more important than the hole itself?

Scott E. Niven, C.G.C.S., has been property manager of The Stanwich Club, Greenwich, Connecticut, since 1983. He also served on the Board of Directors of the Met G.C.S.A. for 11 years, two years as its president and also was a member of the Editorial Review Board for a revision to "Turf Management for Golf Courses," written by Dr. James Beard and sponsored by the U.S.G.A.



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