



By BOB BRAME

**H**ave you ever looked at a practice putting green after a hard day?

Worse, a practice putting green in late August after the last big outing of the summer? It's not uncommon to see what resembles a war zone.

Dirt peering through thin and weak turf around six, nine or sometimes 18 holes, distributed

over what was a uniform green carpet. Looking closer, you may see ragged and rounded hole edges, and often a dozen or more previous hole locations either too low (nice dark green circular depressions) or too high (four and a quarter-inch scalp patch). It's not a pretty picture. Think about what this same green might look like if holes were not being used to practice.

A practice putting green with



Bob Brame

According to many of the game's great teachers, this is particularly true of putting. If you think you're going to miss

no holes? What a crazy thought! Or is it?

We know that golf is a mental game.

the three-footer, you probably will, or at least it becomes a whole lot tougher to knock in. It is interesting that many golf instructors actually discourage practice putting to a hole.

The idea is that you will condition your mind either to see the ball going in or missing the hole. Either way, it can carry over to the golf course. If you're missing on the putting green, you will expect to continue to on the

course.

What happens when you eventually miss one? Suggestion: practice putting to a spot, or place a tee in the green to putt at. It makes sense. Get the feel of the putting surface without focusing on whether the ball goes in a hole.

Improving your putting game by looking at a spot rather than a hole? Interesting. How about agronomics? Even if holes are changed daily on a practice putting green, wear can be very destructive. Worn and bruised turf is more prone to disease activity and weed invasion. This means more chemicals may be needed to counter the effects of heavy, concentrated wear.

Distributing player wear over a larger area will result in healthier turf and a better playing surface. Sounds great, but how can wear be monitored and holes changed often enough to prevent heavy traffic damage? If holes are changed several times on busy days, what will the putting surface look like with numerous transplanted plugs trying to survive and grow in?

Agronomically, there would be value in not using holes for practice putting.

Why not simply cut the base off the small flagsticks normally used on practice putting greens and sharpen the end? All holes are eliminated.

Now the small flagsticks may be pushed into the surface where desired. As wear occurs, players, pro shop or maintenance staff could quickly and easily move the flagstick. Simply pull it up and push it in elsewhere. Plugs from hole changes are eliminated, as are labor costs to move and repair holes.

Players' practicing efforts to small diameter flagsticks produce a better mental foundation for scoring on the course — an attractive combination of benefits.

Give it a try. Fill in the holes, cut off and sharpen the small diameter flagsticks and "play (practice) away."

*Bob Brame is an agronomist with the U.S. Golf Association Green Section's Mid-Atlantic Region. He has recently opened a sub-regional office in Covington, Ky.*

## Delhi dedication

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Delhi College and its students were vital contributors to the success of the Turf Center, Duncan emphasized.

"More than 245 students enrolled in the college's applied technologies programs completed much of the actual construction work as part of their on-the-job training," she said.

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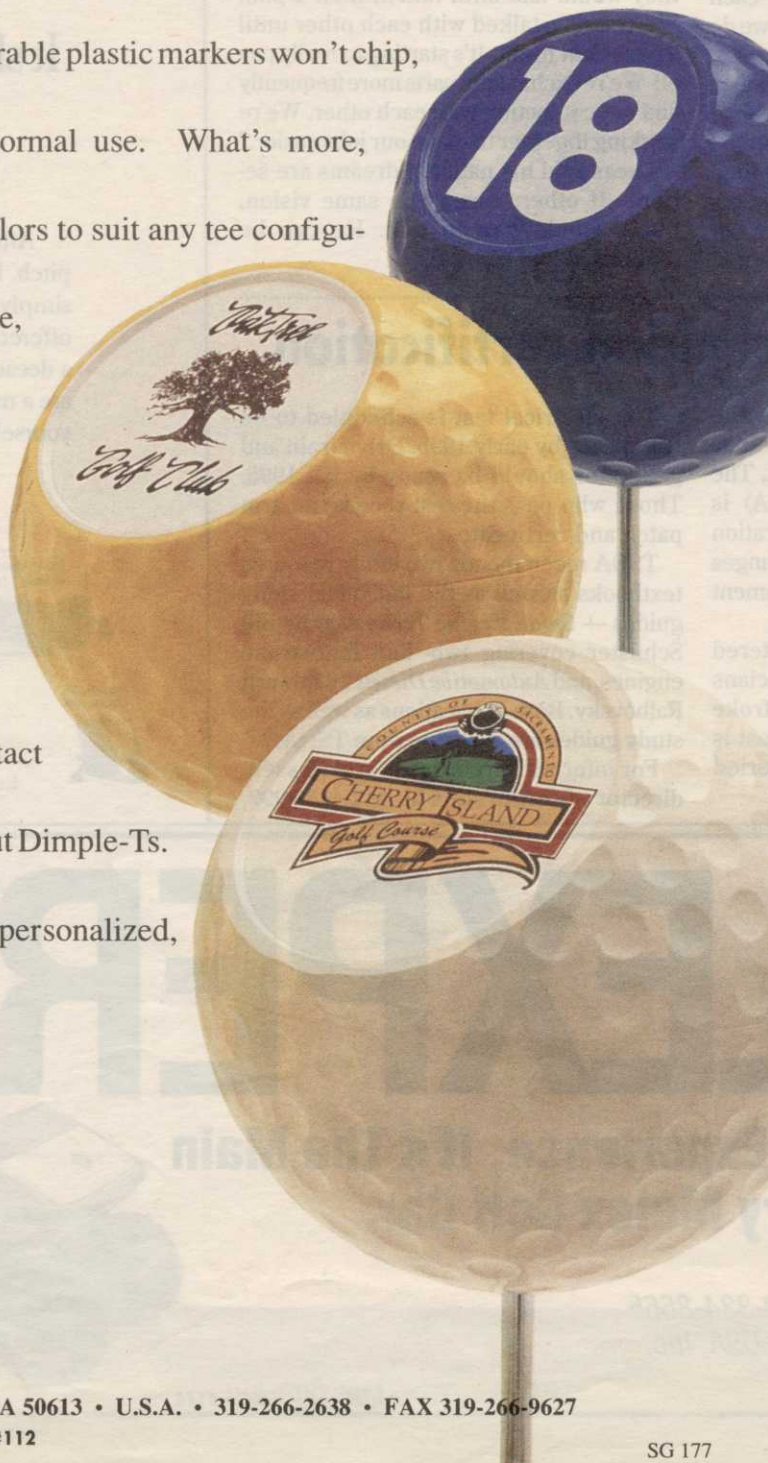
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