



John Walsh
Editor

NO DETAIL TOO SMALL

Flash back. I met Rich Gagnon a few years ago at a GCSAA seminar at the Golf Industry Show in Orlando. I asked about him and his career. He told me about his recent arrival at Segregansett Country Club in Taunton, Mass. We also chatted about industry trends including managing a maintenance budget.

These are how solid stories are unearthed and interesting ideas are publicized – that and carousing from bar to bar at the various conferences listening to attendees whisper, “Now, this is off the record of course,” with a pat on the back and a crooked smile. But I digress.

Fast forward. Earlier this month, I received a call from Rich, with whom I hadn’t spoken in quite some time. After recalling our first encounter, he proceeded to tell me about an unusual complaint from some club members. They wanted him to stop using “metal” flagsticks because balls bounce too hard off them and are less likely to fall into the hole. Rich was using three-quarter-inch tapered tournament flagsticks, but members wanted to return to using one-half-inch solid regulation fiberglass flagsticks.

Boy, I thought, how often is this actually happening that members would complain about it? Well, Rich said he thought the same thing when he first heard the complaint but then assured me of the number of consistently good golfers – damn near scratch – who belong to the club.

So, Rich decided to test three different flagsticks from the same manufacturer – a one-half-inch solid regulation fiberglass flagstick, a three-quarter-inch tapered tournament flagstick and a one-inch aluminum/fiberglass tournament flagstick. Well, lo and behold, the complaints were valid, but barely. Based on 5-percent difference in their favor, it appeared that for every 20 chip shots that hit the flagstick dead-on, one more fell into the cup with the one-half-inch flagstick compared to the three-quarter-inch tapered flagstick. It was a big enough difference to better a golfer score, and we all know how important that is. (For those wanting the name of the company who makes the flagsticks Rich tested, e-mail him at scturf@hotmail.com because I don’t want to be accused of favoring or promoting one manufacturer over another.)

After hearing about Rich’s flagstick test, I was struck by the amount of time and consideration he put into something that I originally thought was just plain silly. So, in turn, I ask you to think about some of the member complaints at your club or course throughout the years. How many were a complete waste of time? How many actually turned out to be valid?

In this competitive industry, there are many capable superintendents who do above-average jobs. But it’s the little things, such as testing different flagsticks to see how balls react after hitting them, that separate you from the pack. It’s important for you to be receptive to new ideas at whatever stage you’re at in your career.

Now, I don’t know if Rich will get a raise because of this test or be appointed “superintendent for life,” but I bet members at Segregansett will remember Rich’s flagstick test for a while. As a result, I’m sure more of them will realize to what extent he will go to improve their golf experience.

This is one small example of the dedication to a job and a facility that many superintendents exhibit every day. It’s the kind of dedication that earns respect and gratitude from those members or golfers who you thought would never give it to you. **GCI**

John Walsh

We would like to hear from you. Please post any comments you have about this column on our message board, which is at www.golfcourseindustry.com/messageboard.



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