

The real culprit of slow play? Players pacing off yardages to and from sprinkler heads. Or so says the peddler of Laser Link, a \$239 hand-held rangefinder that picks up a signal from flagsticks with embedded prisms.

In a matter of seconds, the Laser Link tells the golfer how many yards he has to the hole.

Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer endorse the Laser Link. "Knowing the exact distance to the hole is a key element in hitting a good shot," Nicklaus reasons. "There's nothing as disappointing as hitting a good shot with the wrong yardage. Eliminating doubt allows a player to fully concentrate on shot execution."

In addition, USGA Executive Director David Fay told *Golfweek* last year that he's a "big fan" of the Laser Link.

These heavyweights donned their Laser Link cheerleading sweaters because the device will cut 10 minutes to 15 minutes off the average 300-minute round. At least, that's according to the company.

This assumes that enough golfers buy the device while courses purchase the \$900 set of flagsticks. (And courses budget for replacement sticks in anticipation of pranksters carting them off in the night, or when Judge Smails cracks the prism with his putter).

The product works fine and looks cool. What's not to love for gadget lovers?

Actually, plenty. As with all "progress" in golf, there is underlying cost. Not only is the device an unnecessary expense for the average golfer, the debate over rangefinders takes us back to the question of what constitutes "too much information?"

As the pace-of-play plague is killing the sport, the USGA executive director endorses a commercial solution to the problem.

Why? Because this is easier to implement than addressing the distance issue, which is about longer courses and more rough. Increased distances are logjamming golfers on designs not meant to handle 15-handicappers waiting to reach 545-yard holes in two.

Thankfully, they haven't lost their minds yet over in Scotland.

"As I look out my window over the links of

Too Much Tech, Not Enough Sense

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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St. Andrews," says Peter Dawson, secretary of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club, "the last thing I want to see is a golfer with a bag over his shoulder coming up the 18th fairway and stopping to pull a bloody telescope out of his pocket to measure the distance. What's next? A windmill to measure wind currents?"

Fay answers that concern just as he and the USGA Executive Committee have been addressing the distance issue: "Stop it right there."

Yeah, right. We'll make this one compromise, but all others we'll stop.

Fay points to the information golfers already have and that rangefinders are just a natural extension of yardage markers on sprinkler heads, Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) systems and yardage books.

He's right. But this is the point: The golfer has too much information already. Judgment is supposed to be a key component of the game. So is local knowledge.

A golfer who learns to play a course through osmosis, or actually pacing off yardages, should have an advantage. Information overload strips the sport of subtlety and creativity.

Still, the rangefinder trend takes the issue to a new level. The information we are talking about comes with a much steeper price tag than a \$7 yardage book or \$10 cart rental complete with GPS.

At a time when the USGA claims to be doing its best to grow the game by endorsing various programs that include all-important efforts to make golf less intimidating to newcomers, here they go again rubber-stamping just another commercial solution that adds cost and strips the sport of its integrity.

Where does it end?

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