



What's The Best Color For Flags and Sticks?

By Chad Eberhardt

EDITOR'S NOTE: From time to time subjects come up regarding golf course management that do not fit into a neat category. Most often these subjects relate to the art of course management rather than one of the sciences associated with it.

These subjects almost always are interesting, however. They merit discussion, comment and expressions of opinion and preference.

It is logical, therefore, to create a feature to focus on such subjects. Beginning with this issue and continuing on an "as needed" basis, you will be seeing "THE SPORTING GREEN" feature.

This feature will be distinctive not only for its interesting content but also for its color. You'll never mistake its singular green!

Be thinking of some topics you'd like explored in "THE SPORTING GREEN"; the choices are as broad as the sporting fields we manage.

Chad Eberhardt wrote this inaugural piece. Chad is the assistant golf course superintendent at Blackhawk Country Club in Madison. He is a 1990 graduate of the Turf Management program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He was the assistant at Bull's Eye C.C. Last season.

Special thanks to Sherri Milani and Pam Hoffman for their design of the logo for "THE SPORTING GREEN." —MSM

At the first meeting of Blackhawk Country Club's 1991 Green Committee, a complaint was brought up about our yellow flags and flagsticks. It was explained to us that the solid yellow is difficult to see for the members who are "color blind." I would not classify the complaint as major, but it certainly was interesting.

I thought, "How could we be discriminating against our 'color blind' members for so many years?" Here in Madison, one never knows what group will be the next to protest for equal rights on the steps of our capitol. So, I was bound and determined to head off any formal coming out of the Blackhawk Color Blind Linkster Association. I set out to seek the advice of every expert I could find the ultimate flag/flagstick color.

My first call went out to the United States Golf Association's Public Rela-

Department. Craig Smith professed that in the 1960's, the USGA conducted a study that showed yellow to be the most visible color on a golf course. Therefore, yellow has been the color seen at all PGA Tour events except one where a basket proved to be stronger than a highly conformed to USGA recommendation!

John Kelly, Director of Marketing for Standard Golf, was expert number two. When I asked Mr. Kelly what he would suggest as "the" color, he suggested we let the statistics do the talking. The most popular flagsticks are solid yellow. Kelly added that yellow with a 30" solid black bottom is gaining in popularity since showing up on television at various Senior Tour sites.

The LPGA uses solid white flags and flagsticks. The most popular flag sold has been plain yellow. Red with white has been a distant second choice.

From the statistics, I deduced yellow must be the best. But, Kelly added, flag/flagstick color selection should be based on the natural background setting. For instance, yellow may not show up as well as red or black in the desert.

I asked Mr. Kelly what he would suggest specifically for Wisconsin golf courses. He said without a doubt, "yellow or white." Kelly did point out, however, that white can easily get lost on days when billowy white clouds are in the background.

It was becoming quite evident that yellow was going to be the experts' first choice. But, yellow is also the color that may lead to the next march up State Street. Who could I turn to next?

I figured an optometrist could help me understand what our "color blind" members are, or rather, are not seeing. Dr. Michael Shapiro, M.D., explained that color blindness is the often incorrectly used term for the common condition of being unable to distinguish between certain colors.

Literal color blindness, in which everything is seen in shades of gray, is extremely rare. The most common form of color vision defect is the inability

to distinguish in dim light between reds and greens.

I asked Dr. Shapiro for his advice on an appropriate flag/flagstick color for all the color blind golfers at Blackhawk C.C. I had to practically bend over backwards to convince Dr. Shapiro that color blindness is affecting so many players.

He said if the players really are having trouble with color differentiation, yellow would dramatically *improve* their condition. I told Dr. Shapiro that we have used yellow at Blackhawk C.C. for many years. He responded by saying that color blindness is so uncommon that it cannot reasonably be used as an excuse to change to a new flag/flagstick color.

I went to the University of Wisconsin-Art Department in search of one more expert. I found Ms. Marjorie Kreilich, Professor of Color and Color Theory. I presented her with the opportunity to be flag/flagstick color designer for a new golf course development.

She apologized for not knowing anything about golf. I assured her that would not be a problem. Ms. Kreilich wanted some information pertaining to time of day and background settings. She was set to present me with her plan. At dawn and at dusk, we will put a yellow flag/flagstick out since the color yellow has a very high light value. At high noon, a red flag/flagstick will be used since it offers the most contrast of hues using a medium value. Yeah Right!

All I was seeking was a simple solution to a once simple problem. Ms. Kreilich sensed my frustration and asked me what color I would suggest.

I leaned back in my chair and looked around the room. All of a sudden, I caught a glimpse of my running shoes. There on the end of my feet was the ultimate color sticking out like a sore thumb. "Neon Yellow!" I exclaimed.

Ms. Kreilich concurred that neon yellow's very high brilliance is easily distinguishable from everything and everyone.

I called John Kelly at Standard to find out if Standard offered a neon flag/flagstick. He said no one has ever asked for that color. And besides, neon is not colorfast so it would fade to white rather quickly.

Oh, well, mission accomplished. Now all that is left to do is wonder if we will be seeing neon yellow flags and flagsticks on our golf courses in the near future!