

Myth Busted—

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5% difference in the members' favor, it appeared that for every 20 chip shots that hit the flagstick dead-on, one more fell into the cup with the half-inch flagstick compared to the three-quarter-inch tapered flagstick. Although not a major difference, there still was a difference.

"If I hit the flagstick with 100 chip shots this year, I want the five birdies—there's a difference!" Dion says. "If I go up against a good chipper in the club championship, I want the three-quarter-inch flagsticks in. Who wouldn't?"

Most golfers would say there's no difference which flagstick was in the cup. And, statistically, the 5% difference in our results would probably hold true for 100 coin tosses. But one flagstick had to win the race and the results would never turn out 50/50 anyway. There might not seem to be a difference between the half-inch and the three-quarter-inch flagsticks, but when the two pins were matched up against the one-inch flagstick, the results proved there can be a significant difference between flagsticks and the percentage of balls falling into the cup. The biggest shock of all was that with the one-inch flagsticks, no balls fell into the hole. That's right, none. It's hard to imagine there would be such a big difference, especially since the bottom 12 inches of all three flagsticks is exactly the same width (half-inch) and made of fiberglass.

Weigh in

I took things a step further and wanted to see if weight had any effect on the results since the area that the ball was hitting was exactly the same on all the flagsticks. The three-quarter-inch flagstick was heavier than the half-inch one, but the one-inch flagstick was lighter than the three-quarter-inch flagstick. Weight, materials and width in the impact area all have no effect on the results.

Is 5% difference enough to change the flagsticks at Segregansett to the half-inch ones? It's still debatable, but I can assure you that after reading the results of our experiment you'll never see the one-inch flagsticks in our cups again. That is, until my chairman goes up against a good chipper in the club championship.

Flag Sticks

By STEVE GARSKE, *President, Par Aide Products Co.*

I am pleased to have the opportunity to comment on Rich's article regarding the different flag sticks. The article is well written and to the extent of his testing and based on his testing method, we are quite certain his results are undeniable.

Some history: What Par Aide has always called its Tournament pole, was originally brought to market in the early '60s. For many years it was commonly found in use for PGA Tour events.

It was made of a heavy gauge, wedged aluminum which gave it the tapered top section. The bottom was a steel shank inserted on one end into the aluminum and had a ferrule on the other. The steel shank was exposed about 8" to conform to the USGA regulations for a flag stick. Needless to say, a chipped ball was all but hitting a solid wall upon impact and the ball did indeed bounce off, irritating the low handicap golfers. Likely due to this issue our sales declined in the early '80s to where we were phasing it out. Then Bay Hill in Orlando insisted on using them at their course in spite of my warning. Within a couple months, the issue was at the forefront and the flag sticks removed. However, it didn't end there. They liked the look and wanted to continue with this flag stick style. We re-engineered it with the lighter aluminum body and the fiberglass top and bottom

shanks. Apparently it was acceptable as the Palmer courses used them with their distinctive striping pattern on their courses around the world. The popularity of this flag stick grew and is growing today.

I believe that this flag stick has a place in golf. It is commonly chosen by Superintendents who have a membership who appreciate the greater visibility it provides. Others like the ability to custom paint, and repaint, and others just like the look. I would, however, generally agree with Rich Gagnon and would not choose it for use on a country club that has a high number of low handicappers.

What a long, strange trip our 1" Tournament Pole has taken. While it wouldn't impact the relative results, Rich found, it does make me wonder when the golf ball itself, forever "improved" for greater distance, etc., will react in a similar manner to all flag sticks.

Please allow me to reiterate our appreciation of Rich Gagnon's interest and effort on this issue. It's this kind of feedback that drives us to constantly look for improvements and to innovate. Thank you, Steve Garske, President, Par Aide Products Co.

(Editor's Note: Steve Garske was asked to respond/comment on the original test by Superintendent Rich Gagnon.)

