

Move Those Markers

By: Pat Cross, Southwest Director

The proper placement of tee markers seems to be a hot topic with some golfers and committees. From the superintendent's perspective, it is important to move the markers daily to distribute traffic and allow for turf recovery. From the perspective of the committee, where you place the tee markers can have an impact on the USGA Course and Slope Rating, and a person's USGA Handicap Index. There is a lot of misinformation on both sides regarding course setup and the placement of tee markers. Hopefully, this article will clarify a few issues.

For the purposes of measuring and rating the course, a permanent marker (or tee monument) is placed next to the tee. Many golfers have the mistaken opinion that the tee markers must always be placed exactly at the permanent marker to preserve the Course Rating. This is false, since the Course Rating takes into account the daily movement of tee markers. Keeping the markers in one place wears out the grass, especially on Par 3 tees. If it were so important to play from a permanent marker, why do we have alternate tees or tees larger than 18 ft. wide and 8 ft. deep? Why not just put a plastic mat on the ground and be done with it! The reason is simple - moving the tee markers provides a different challenge, adds variety to club selection and strategy, and makes the game more interesting. The key concept to keep in mind is *preserving the overall effective playing length*. There are various ways to do this. Please consider the following examples and guidelines:

- If the yardage is changed by 10 yards on a hole, either through the location of the markers or flag stick, that yardage should be made up on another hole.
- It is not recommended to place all the tees forward or all the tees back, since this affects the overall course length. Remember the magic number of **22 yards (18 yards for women)**. An increase or decrease of 22 yards (18 yards for women) on the total effective playing length of the course changes the Course Rating by one-tenth (0.10) of a stroke. One tenth of a stroke is not highly significant, but if for example

the markers are placed 10 yards in front of the monuments on every hole, you have reduced the overall length by 180 yards. Just based on the yardage, the 180 yard change would make the course play 8 strokes easier than its Course Rating and would also impact the Slope Rating. This is significant enough to effect a person's Handicap Index.

- Shortening the course is often done during the weekend in an effort to improve the pace of play. As you can see from the previous example, this is not recommended since it can significantly influence the difficulty of the golf course and the resulting Handicap Index. If pace of play is a problem, you may wish to remove the markers from the championship tees on the weekend and just play from the middle and forward tees.
 - Try to avoid extremes. For example, it is not recommended to set markers back 30 yards on a hole and then move them forward 30 yards on another hole. Try to keep the markers within 10 to 15 yards of the monument.
- If you place the tee markers forward, you don't have to place the hole at the back of the green. The position of the hole does not have to correspond to the position of the tee markers on a specific hole. It is perfectly acceptable to put the tees forward and the hole in the front of the green, or the tees back and the hole in the back of the green. Try to provide balance and variety in hole locations among right, left, center, back, middle and front while preserving the overall effective playing length.

- There is no rule for how far apart to set the markers. As a general guideline, the markers should be placed five to six paces apart (15 to 18 feet) perpendicular to the line of play and the intended landing zone. This is an acceptable width for the distribution of traffic and for determining if the ball is within the teeing ground.
- Remember to provide two club lengths of tee surface behind the markers, especially when using the back part of the tee.
- Properly align the tee markers so they direct the golfers to the intended landing zone. On a dog leg hole, the markers should point to the fairway — not the green.
- The USGA Course Rating and Slope are based on the *effective* playing length and playing difficulty under *normal conditions*. If the course is abnormally wet and soft, such as after overseeding or during rainy weather, it is acceptable to shorten the overall length of the course to compensate for the loss of bounce and roll on the fairways. Conversely, if the weather is dry and windy, you can stretch it out a bit.

As you can see, there are many different factors that affect the USGA Course Rating, Slope, and Handicap Index. A big factor is course set up and the placement of tee markers. The tee markers don't have to be on the monument every day. Move those markers around and try to maintain a good balance to preserve both the challenge and playing quality of the golf course as well as the integrity of the USGA Course and Slope Ratings.

Did You Know?

A bylaw change is being proposed that will change the Annual Meeting from April to January, beginning in the year 2000. Ken Williams, CGCS has been assigned the task of preparing the appropriate language that will place the revisions before the membership at the Annual Meeting this April.

The proposal to amend the bylaws was approved by the Board at the urging of Terry Grasso, who suggested scheduling the Annual Meeting in January might boost attendance.