

# A Celebration of Colt's Masterpiece

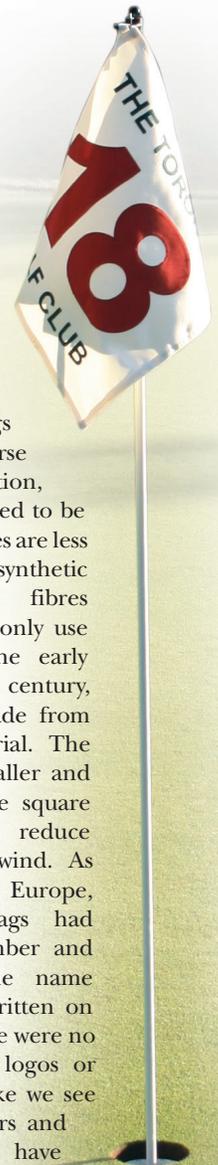
by Bill Green, Assistant Superintendent,  
Toronto Golf Club

This year marks the centennial of The Toronto Golf Club on its current site. In recognition of this significant event in the club's history, The Toronto Golf Club (TGC) celebrated the centennial of its Colt Course on August 25th this year. In preparation for the celebration, the Senior Management Group initiated a plan to incorporate a few details that would replicate the golf experience as it was in 1912. The Toronto Golf Club was established in 1876 and is the third oldest golf club in North America. In the early part of the 20th century, the City of Toronto was growing rapidly. As homes and industry began to encroach on the Fern-hill property, it became evident to members that in order for the club to survive, it would need to re-locate. After an extensive three-year search all over the Toronto area, the perfect site was found along the banks of the Etobicoke Creek in Long Branch. Construction commenced in the spring of 1911, immediately after the new land purchase was finalized. The layout was designed by Englishmen Harry S. Colt, who is recognized as one of the premier architects in golf. Lead by H.S. Colt, a team of 45 Bulgarian and Romanian labourers constructed the course in seven months and by the fall of 1912, the new golf course opened for play. A significant amount of research went into replicating a 1912 golf experience. After consultation with golf historians like Dr. Michael Hurdzan, a number of ideas emerged to help celebrate this centennial milestone.



At the centennial celebration, participants received a replica rubber golf ball with the Colt Course centennial logo (above). Replica flags were created, pictured right, to create a 1912 golf experience for the centennial event.

One of the most authentic ideas was to replicate flags used circa 1912. It was very difficult to find information on what the flags looked like back then at TGC, or any golf course for that matter. After hours of investigation, there were a few important details that needed to be incorporated into the design. Man-made fibres are less than a century old; until 1910, there were no synthetic or chemical fibres like we commonly use today. In the early part of the century, flags were made from a canvas material. The flags were smaller and cut in a more square fashion to reduce damage from wind. As often seen in Europe, traditional flags had the hole number and sometimes the name of the club written on the flag. There were no silk screened logos or embroidery like we see today. Numbers and letters would have



been hand cut and stitched like you might see on the back of a hockey jersey. The flags were fastened to the poles using string ties that are stitched on the edge of the flag. The flag pole itself was significantly shorter. Poles would often range from only five to six feet tall.

Another idea to re-create the 1912 golf experience was to use sand golf tees. The golf tee was not common practice until the 1920's. Prior to this, golfers used sand to tee the ball up off the ground. The reference tee box came from a box that was beside all teeing areas. The box usually contained sand, water, and a

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towel. A golfer or caddy would mix the water and sand with their hands and mold the sand to create their tee and use the towel to wipe their hands clean. Often times the tee box would have the hole number, yardage and any other information on the hole. Shortly after learning that this was the common practice in 1912, it was discovered in an old picture that there were indeed tee boxes at TGC. Based on the blurred picture, an extensive effort ensued to replicate the tee box. During the celebration event, student intern Andrew Krek (Olds College) made sand tees for all participants to hit from while he explained the history of sand tee boxes and the golf tee.

In 1912 the most common golf ball used was the rubber core ball. The rubber ball was the first multi-layer golf ball and was a major breakthrough in golf ball technology. The replica ball is exclusively made for play with hickory shafted clubs. With a soft and energetic core, it is meant to feel like an early rubber band wound ball. Square dimples were the most popular style of the hickory era. The mold used to make the replicas was an antique golf ball mold purchased from a collector. The balls help protect the wooden shafts of the old clubs by not sending a shock wave up the shaft. At our centennial celebration, all participants received a replica rubber golf ball with the Colt Course centennial logo.

Sheep were commonly found on golf courses in the early part of the 20th century. A proper 1912 golf experience cannot be replicated without 30 paper sheep randomly grazing the course. Included in the herd were two black sheep that, if spotted, the members name was entered into a draw for a free lamb dinner.

Other features of the day included knickers worn by Pro shop

staff. During lunch prior to golfing, a re-enactment of a 1912 foursome playing the 18th hole was performed while bag pipes played in the background. To top the day off, the celebration ended with a fireworks show. Overall the event was an outstanding success. Members and guests received a small taste of what golf was like in 1912.

As we celebrate the year of the Colt Course, John Gravett, General Manager & C.O.O. and TGC wanted to recognize the men and women who have managed the golf course over the past 100 years in its current location. On October 12th, John Gravett and Al Schwemler hosted a centennial golf tournament for all former employees of the club who are still in the turfgrass management business. There were 28 attendees that included superintendents, assistants, second assistants, sales reps, and some current Toronto Golf Club staff members. The celebrations of the colt course have provided us with an opportunity to reflect on the past, explore old traditions and pay tribute to the people that have lead us to where golf is today. ■



*OGSA President Doug Breen presents to Al Schwemler, Superintendent, Toronto Golf Club in recognition of 100 years of leadership and support of golf course management in Ontario.*

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