

July 2022 – Did You Know? A Brief History of the Golf Tee

“Tee it high and let it fly.”

This month we explore golf tees. What’s to explore, you ask? Well, a lot. First, there was no such thing as a golf tee centuries ago. Setting the ball up when starting a hole was a messy proposition in olden days. There was a bucket of sand and water on the teeing area. The golfer grabbed a handful, formed it into a mound, and plopped a ball on it, like this:

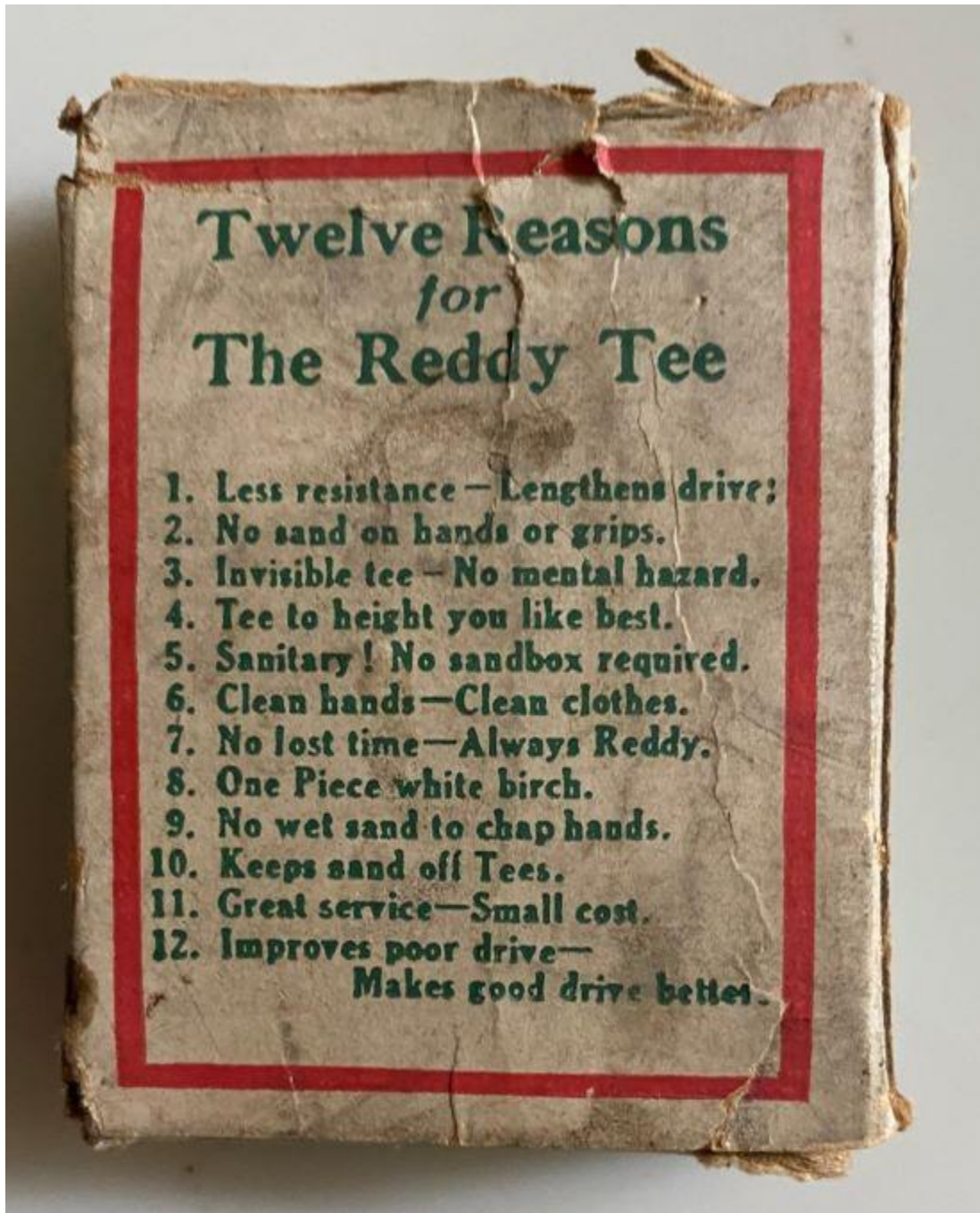


Aside: The earliest known ball was a “featherie” (animal skin stitch up and stuffed with feathers), and later a “guttie” (gutta percha molded to form a sphere). It’s a guttie in this photo.

Grabbing a handful of wet sand was messy; there had to be a better way. In the late 19th century a dentist by the name of George Grant invented the first wooden tee. Dr. Grant obtained a patent for it in 1899 but it didn't catch on right away. Apparently, Dr. Grant was more golf inventor than marketer. It was 20 years later when the wooden tee was commercially produced. William Lowell, another golfer who ironically also was a dentist, started manufacture of wooden tees that he marketed as "The Reddy Tee". Dr. Lowell eventually had his wooden tee patented. Here is a pack of his Reddy Tees:



Each box had ten tees. The back of the box extolled the many advantages of using The Reddy Tee:



Note that some of Dr. Lowell's marketing message on his Reddy Tee box is exactly what Dr. Grant had discovered two decades earlier. We owe our clean hands to Drs. Grant and Lowell, both dentists and golfers, so a big "thank you" to these long-ago dentists who were also inventors and golfers!



Dr. George Grant



Dr. William Lowell

For more of this history, click on these links:

<https://www.pga.com/archive/how-dr-george-f-grant-went-african-american-dentist-golf-tee-inventor?amp=1>

<http://www.thegolfballfactory.com/the-golf-course/hole14/the-reddy-tee.htm>

Golf Tees Today

The Reddy Tee from a century ago was short, only 1 ½ inches. Now our tees are much longer. Four inches is the maximum allowed by the USGA Equipment Rules, R 6.2. Just in case you are wondering, our Blythefield tees in the box at the starter station are 2 ¾ inches.

Although the invention of the golf tee was a real advance in the game, it has caused some issues, like these:

- Some players just leave their tee in the ground rather than pocketing it for the next hole. Even though the club supplies us with tees, there is a cost. You should use them until they break.
- Tees eventually do break, leaving debris on the tee box unless the golfer is careful to pick up the pieces. (This is just like leaving litter on the road or in a park; please don't.)
- Our maintenance crew cleans up the tee boxes every day and mows them three times per week. Tees left behind by golfers are a problem for the maintenance crew, adding about an hour each day just picking them up.

- The blades on the mowers are sharpened regularly, but they need to be sharpened much sooner if they are dulled by tees. Our grounds crew might not see tees left behind; we could reduce blade sharpening by all of us tidying up.
- Our modern tee is made so the ball sits up high, where we want it when hitting a driver. It is much too long for tee shots using other clubs, so we put the tee almost at ground level before putting a ball on it. Sometimes the tee is hard to get out of the ground, causing a broken fingernail or (horrors!) ruining that recent manicure. Here's a hint: you can loosen a tee stuck in the ground by placing your club head against it and then giving the back of the club head a little kick. It works every time.
- We have five par 3's at Blythefield giving us frequent opportunities to break a tee, so there is a little box for broken tees. Some players find a broken tee to use when not hitting "the big stick". You might worry that there won't be broken tees left behind if we avoid littering. But there is a solution. Read on –

Shortie tees about the same size as the old Reddy Tees are still being made. I keep a shortie in my pocket when playing, so I have one when I'm using less than driver off the tee. Shorties don't break as easily, so there's less potential for tee litter.

Some courses have them available for golfers, along with regular length tees. Our pro shop has ordered some shortie tees for us, on a trial basis to see if this helps. You will find this bowl of shorties at the starter's station with this label:

NEW – SHORTIE TEES

USE THEM ON PAR 3 HOLES, TO REDUCE TEE BREAKAGE

PLEASE, AVOID LITTER - PICK UP YOUR TEE

BCC GREEN COMMITTEE THANKS YOU!

Brent Rector

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p.s. If you haven't seen the movie "Phantom of the Open" yet, put it on your to-do list. It has a feel-good ending featuring Maurice Flitcroft's 1988 visit to Blythefield CC for our famous Flitcroft Stag. The movie took some artistic liberties, but Maurice and his wife Jean really were our guests for the tournament named in his, ahem . . . honor.

[The Phantom of the Open](#)