

# GUNG HO FOR GOLF!

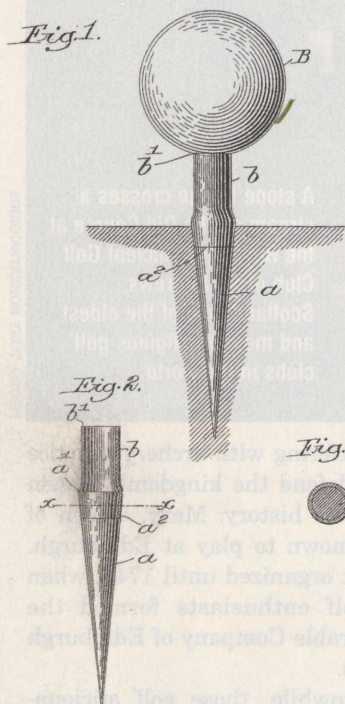
“He enjoys that perfect peace, that peace beyond all understanding,

which comes at its maximum only to the man who has given up golf.”

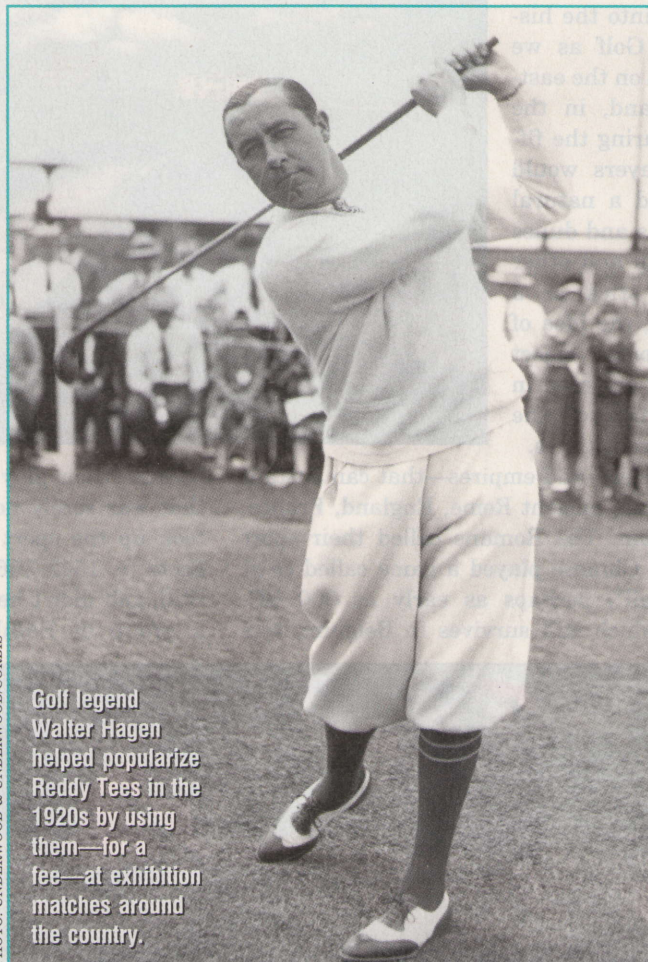
P. G. WODEHOUSE  
English novelist

“Show me a man who is a good loser and I'll show you a man who is playing golf with his boss.”

JIM MURRAY  
Sportswriter



Dr. George Grant included this drawing with his 1899 patent application for a golf tee. The tee “must firmly, yet lightly, support the ball,” the application reads, and “must be so constructed that it will not in any manner interfere with the swing or ‘carry through’ of the club.”



Golf legend Walter Hagen helped popularize Reddy Tees in the 1920s by using them—for a fee—at exhibition matches around the country.

PHOTO: UNDERWOOD & UNDERWOOD/CORBIS

That year, William Lowell, of New Jersey, who was also a dentist, took up golf at the age of 59. The meticulous doctor found that creating a wet sand mound was messy and soiled the clothes. He came up with the idea to use gutta-percha, a material employed in making false teeth (in addition to golf balls in the 1800s). Lowell shaped some of this rubbery material into pointed pegs while it was still warm, and he used his thumb to create a curved surface to hold the ball. The device worked well enough, but it broke too easily. Realizing he had a good design but the wrong material, Dr. Lowell hit upon the idea of whittling pegs from the wooden flagpole in front of his home into the same shape as his gutta-percha tee.

Dr. Lowell obtained a patent for his new idea, which he modestly described as a device “for use upon the green of a golf course, and for the placing thereon of a golf ball . . .” His description understates the immensity of the transition that took place in golf equipment. Lowell’s patent, issued on May 13, 1924, changed a four-hundred-year-old process.

## The Tee Takes Off

Playing companions laughed at Lowell’s invention when he used it for the first time at his country club. But both his sons felt immediately that the wooden peg had marketable possibilities. Initially, 5,000 tees were manufactured from white birch. The first tees were green, but when their color was changed to red to make them

more visible, they were given the trade name Reddy Tees.

In the beginning, a great many golf professionals, amateurs, and lady golfers dismissed this new golf contraption. But eventually, for a \$1,500 fee, the famed golfer Walter Hagen and his sidekick Joe Kirkwood used the wooden tee in exhibition matches—and were happy to relieve the good doctor of his money for just sticking a peg into the ground.

Hagen described what happened after he and Kirkwood used the tee at an exhibition match at Shennecossett Golf Course, in Groton, Connecticut. “Joe and I strutted around the course with the bright, red tees stuck behind our ears. At each tee we used them . . . and left them. Kids scrambled on the course grabbing them as souvenirs.