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(54) **GOLF BALL RETRIEVAL DEVICE AND ASSOCIATED METHOD**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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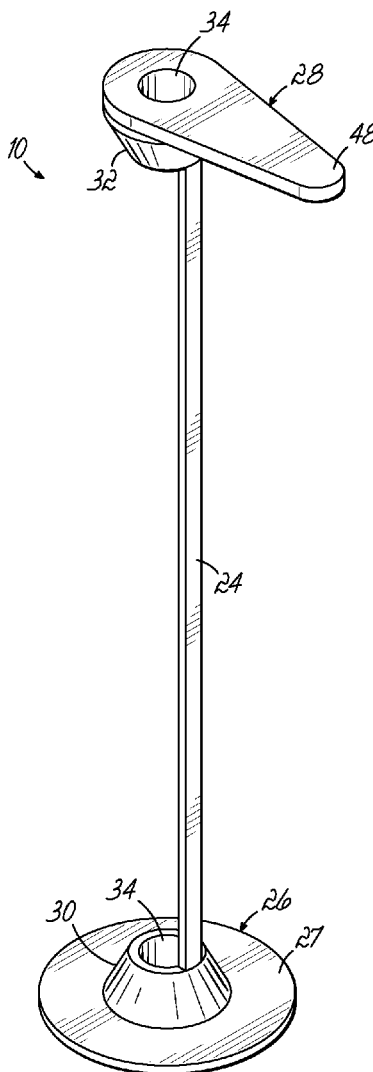
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A golf ball retrieval device couples to a shaft of the flag stick while it is upstanding in a cup on a golf green. The device includes a support member at a lower end of a stem and a handle at an upper end of the stem. When attached to the flag stick, the support member is seated in the cup with the stem projecting upwardly to the handle. When a golfer holes out with his or her ball in the cup along with the flag stick, the ball is supported on the support member in the cup. To retrieve the ball from the cup, and without touching the flag stick, the golfer hooks the putter under the handle of the device and raises the handle and support member connected thereto along the shaft of the flag stick until the ball exits the cup on the support member. The golfer may allow the ball to roll off of the support member and back onto the green or grab the ball from the support member.



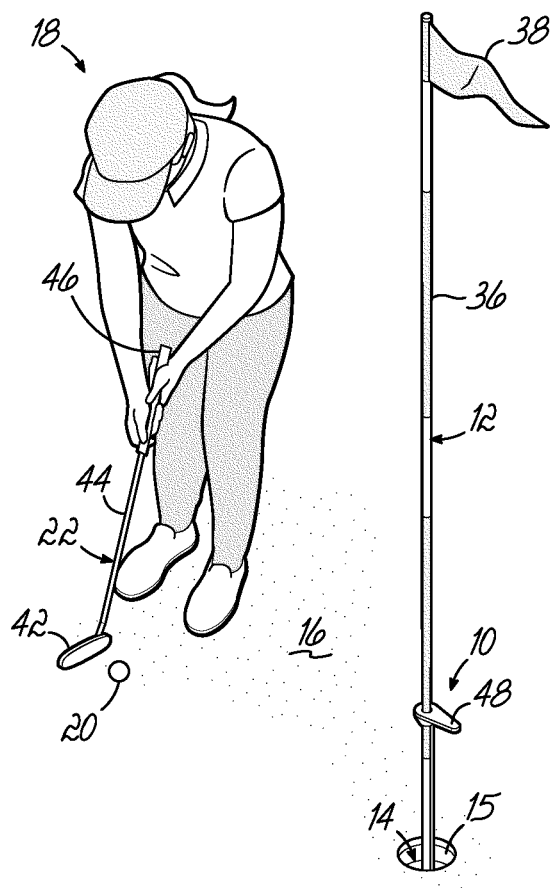


FIG. 1

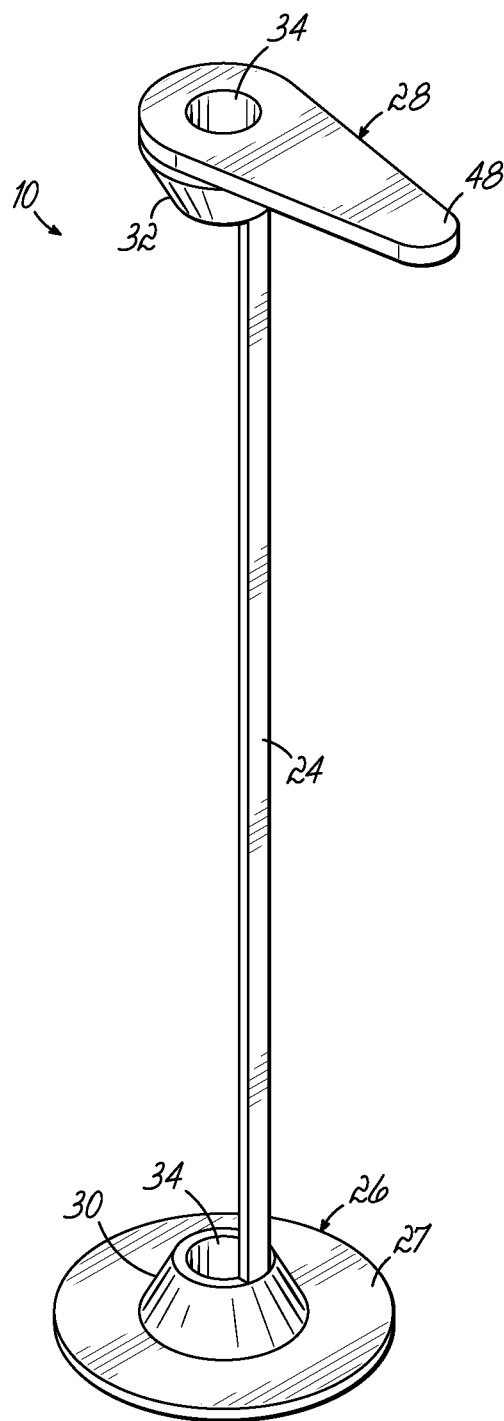


FIG. 2

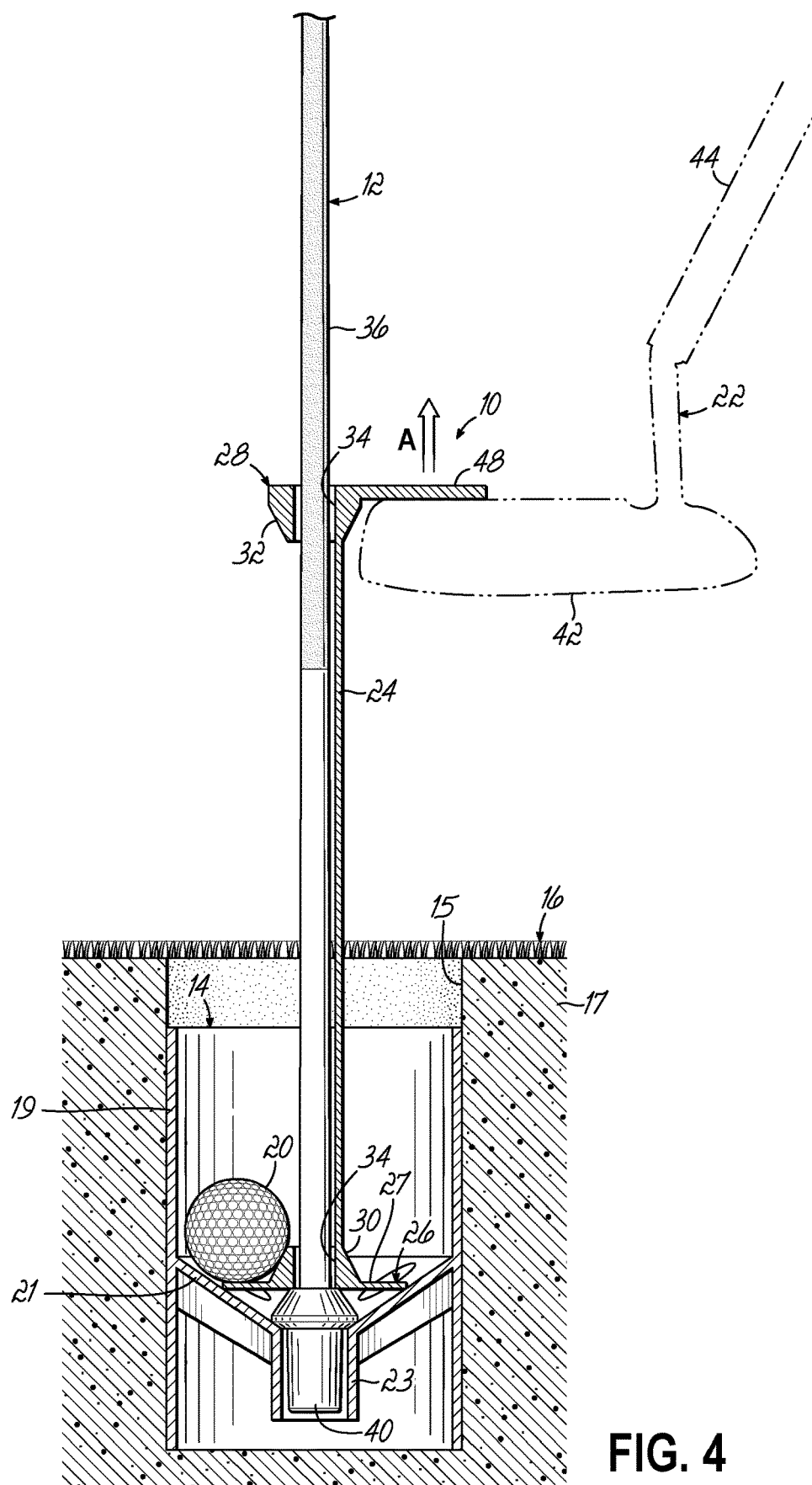


FIG. 4

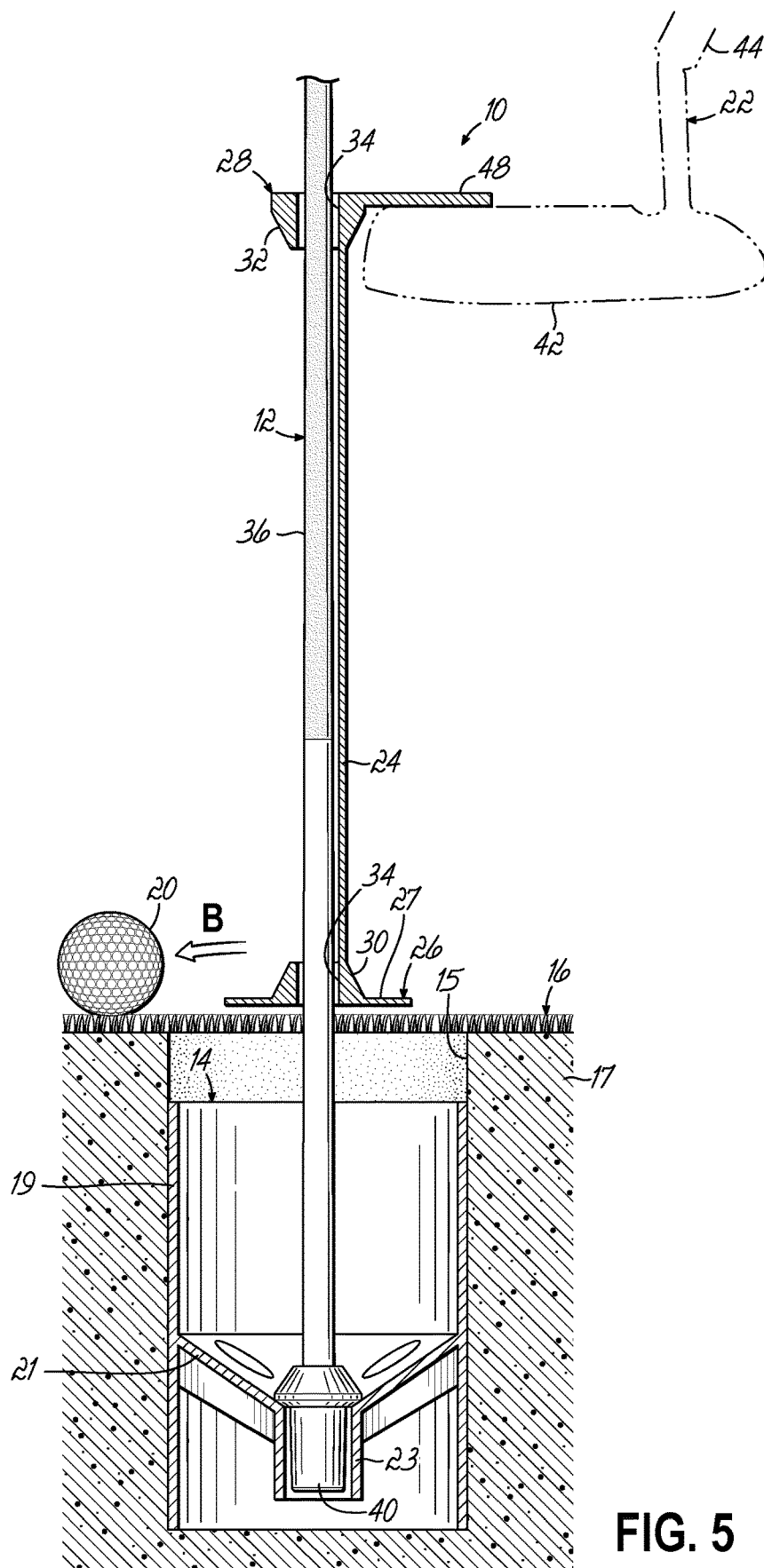
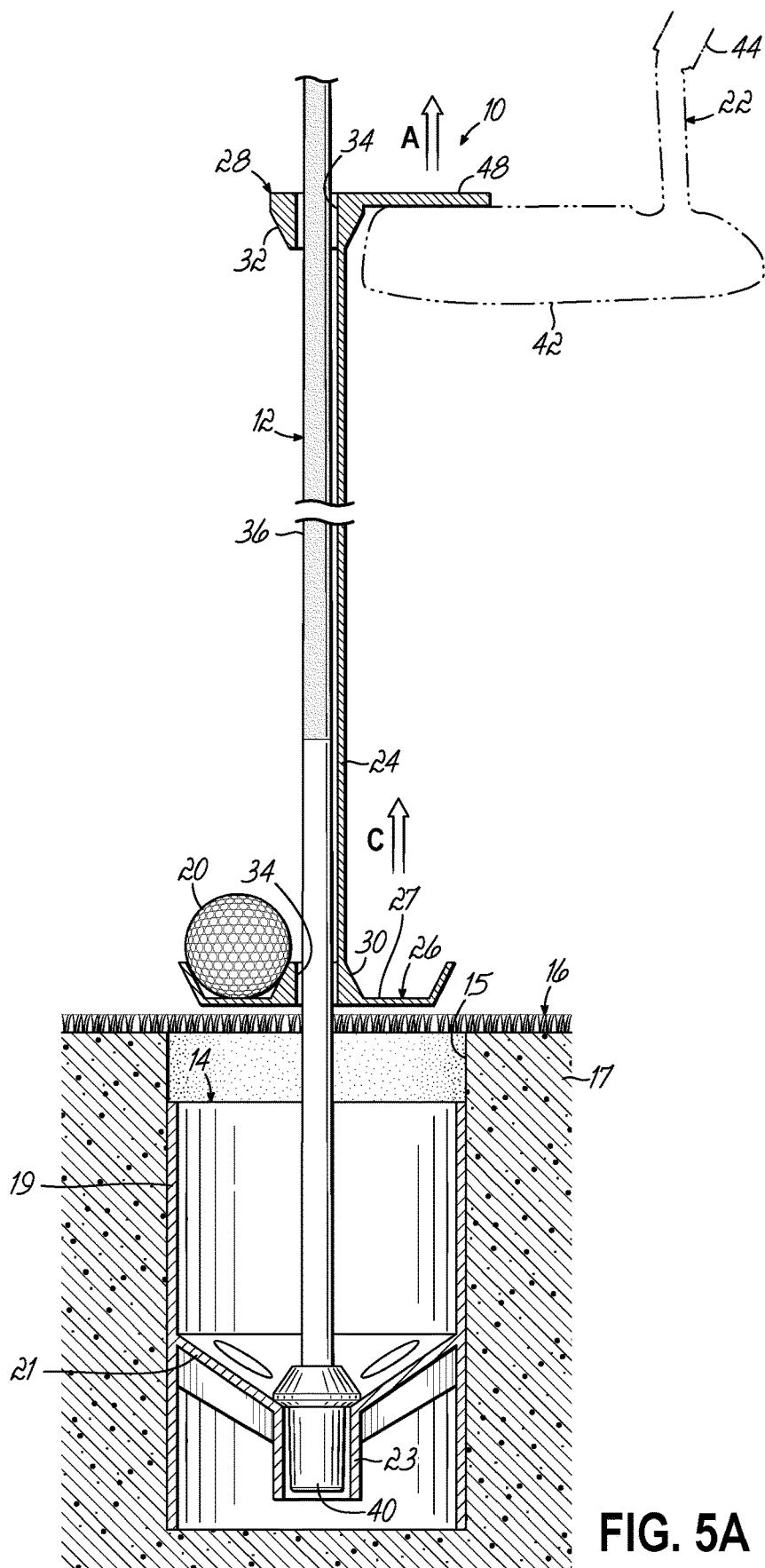


FIG. 5



GOLF BALL RETRIEVAL DEVICE AND ASSOCIATED METHOD

[0001] This claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 63/028,823, filed May 22, 2020 and hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention pertains to the game of golf. More particularly, this invention is a device to assist in retrieving a golf ball from the cup while the flag is upstanding in the cup.

[0003] In a typical game, a golf ball is played on each hole until it reaches its destination, a cup on a putting green. Typically, the ball is not retrieved by a user until it falls into the cup. The act of retrieving the golf ball may be uncomfortable and inconvenient to the user, requiring the user to repetitively bend over or kneel to reach within the cup. Often, the cup is recessed in moist soil and it is undesirable if contact with the perimeter besmirches the hand or glove of the user. Subsequent to inclement weather, the cup may be filled with precipitation run off or the like.

[0004] The hole placed into the green on a golf course is selectively placed by the greens keeper in one of a number of predetermined locations on the green by retracting a plug of sod and dirt and inserting a rigid cup member into the formed hole. Typically, the cup member is formed from plastic, though other rigid materials, such as aluminum can also be utilized. The bottom of the cup member is typically fluted and sloped to position the ball dropped into the cup member into the center of the bottom of the cup member. Accordingly, the bottom of the generally cylindrical cup member is sloped from the outer perimeter toward the center at approximately fifteen degrees from the horizontal orientation. Often the center portion of the bottom of the cup member is sized to receive a golf ball.

[0005] In the game of golf, it is desirous for several reasons to be able to retrieve a golf ball without bending over. Once a ball has been hit into a cup, it is also desirous to remain as far away from the cup as possible to cause minimal disturbance to the green immediately around the cup. This is, for one reason, to maintain the green for golfers to follow.

[0006] Many golfers have a physical disability, injury, or other limitation that prohibits—or at least makes it difficult—to bend over to pick up the ball. Such golfers are limited in their ability to play in that they may require another golfer or a caddy to retrieve their ball, or they may be prohibited from playing altogether.

[0007] Similar situations arise for those same golfers when retrieving a flag stick laying on the ground. It is common to remove the flag stick from the hole and lay it on the ground away from the hole once the hole is in the golfer's sight when addressing the golf ball for a putt. Golfers with physical disabilities or limitations often find it difficult to bend to retrieve golf clubs and flag sticks that are lying on the ground.

[0008] The prior art provides an assortment of golf ball retrievers for overcoming the inconveniences of retrieving a golf ball from a cup. Traditional golf ball retrievers may be complex, often requiring multiple components and corresponding manufacturing processes. These traditional golf ball retrievers tend to be costly relative to the convenience which they provide. Some conventional golf ball retrievers

are sold as being unitary with a putter. However, these retrievers limit the selection of a putter to one having a golf ball retriever incorporated therein. Other golf ball retrievers are sold separate from the putter such that a user may install it on any putter, or any other golf club for that matter. However, these golf ball retrievers and the assembly process required may be costly and overly burdensome to the user. Further, these golf ball retrievers may require much alteration to the golf club shaft which may be undesirable to the user. Moreover, each golfer must have a golf ball retriever for his or her own use requiring the cost and expense of such an aid to be the responsibility of each golfer.

[0009] Moreover, the vast majority of known golf ball retrievers are designed to only be utilized when the flag stick is removed from the cup. However, the United States Golf Association (USGA) recently established that there will no longer be a penalty for the golfer if a ball played from the putting green hits the flag stick left in the cup. As such, players have the option to leave the flag stick in the cup while putting out thereby having their ball in the cup along with the flag stick. Most golf ball retrievers are not designed for getting the ball out of the cup with the stick also in the cup.

[0010] With the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, many golf courses have closed, at least temporarily, and those courses which are open have instituted various measures in an effort to limit the spread of the virus. One such measure is to limit, or prohibit, each golfer from touching the flag stick in an effort to avoid spreading the virus among the golfers, each of which might otherwise touch the flag stick when putting out on the green. This makes it even more difficult to retrieve one's ball from the cup and makes many known ball retrievers ineffective.

[0011] Therefore, an improved golf ball retriever is needed which complies with the prohibition of touching the flag stick in the cup, or otherwise, and avoids the need to bend over or kneel down to retrieve the ball from the cup with the flag stick in the cup.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] These and other objectives of this invention have been attained by various embodiments of this invention which is a golf ball retriever and associated method. In various embodiments, this invention is a device which couples to a shaft of the flag stick while it is upstanding in a cup on a golf green. The device includes a support member at a lower end of a stem and a handle at an upper end of the stem. When attached to the flag stick, the support member is seated in the cup with the stem projecting upwardly to the handle and generally parallel to the shaft of the flag stick. In various embodiments, the support member and handle each have a hole through which the shaft of the flag stick projects. In other embodiments of this invention, the device may have one or more clips or other mechanism to couple it to the flag stick for movement along the shaft of the flag stick.

[0013] When a golfer holes out with his or her ball in the cup along with the flag stick, the ball is supported on the support member in the cup. To retrieve the ball from the cup, and without touching the flag stick, the golfer, caddy or playing partner simply hooks the putter or other club or tool under the handle of the device and raises the handle and support member connected thereto along the shaft of the flag stick until the ball exits the cup on the support member. The golfer may allow the ball to roll off of the support member

and back onto the green for retrieval. Alternatively, the golfer may raise the device with the ball on the support member until the golfer or anyone can grab the ball from the support member. This can be accomplished without the golfer kneeling or bending over to retrieve the ball from the cup and without touching the flag stick.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] The above-mentioned and other features and advantages of this invention, and the manner of attaining them, will become more apparent and the invention itself will be better understood by reference to the following description of embodiments of the invention taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0015] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a golfer on a golf green putting a golf ball toward a cup with a flag stick and a ball retrieval device according to one embodiment of this invention seated in the cup;

[0016] FIG. 2 is an enlarged perspective view of the ball retrieval device of FIG. 1;

[0017] FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view of the green and cup of FIG. 1 with the ball, flag stick and ball retrieval device in the cup;

[0018] FIG. 4 is a view similar to FIG. 3 with a golfer's putter raising a handle of the ball retrieval device and a support member connected to the handle and supporting the ball in the cup;

[0019] FIG. 5 is a view similar to FIGS. 3-4 with the support member of the ball retrieval device raised out of the cup and the ball rolling off of the support member and onto the green for retrieval; and

[0020] FIG. 5A is a view similar to FIG. 5 of an alternative embodiment of the ball retrieval device of this invention with the ball remaining on the support member being raised via the handle so the golfer may retrieve the ball directly from the support member.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0021] One embodiment of a golf ball retrieval device 10 according to this invention is shown in FIG. 1 coupled to a flag stick 12 projecting upwardly from a cup 14 on a golf green or other putting surface 16 with a golfer 18 putting a golf ball 20 toward the cup 14 with a putter 22. The ball retrieval device 10 of FIG. 1 is shown in more detail in FIG. 2. The ball retrieval device 10 includes a stem 24 extending between a support member 26 on a lower end and a handle 28 on an upper end of the stem 24. The support member 26 has central conical boss 30 extending upwardly from a disc shaped base 27 and the handle 28 has a conical boss 32 extending downwardly. Each conical boss 30, 32 has a central through hole 34 which is sized to allow a shaft 36 of the flag stick 12 to pass therethrough and permit relative movement between the ball retrieval device 10 and the shaft 36. The handle 28 of the ball retrieval device 10 has a projection 48 which extends generally perpendicularly from the conical boss 32 relative to the longitudinal axis of the stem 24.

[0022] The flag stick 12 includes a banner 38 mounted at a top end of the shaft 36 and a ferrule 40 at a bottom end (see FIG. 3). The putter 20 includes a head 42 for striking the golf ball 20, a shaft 44 and a grip 46. It will be appreciated that the putter 20 and flag stick 12 described herein and shown

in the drawings are exemplary and not a limitation on this invention, which could be used with a wide variety of putters 22 and flag sticks 12.

[0023] Referring to FIG. 3, an exemplary cup 14 is shown in cross-section and is likewise only one of a variety of cup 14 designs which can be used with this invention. The cup 14 is positioned in a hole 15 in the soil 17 underlying the grass of the putting green 16. The cup 14 includes an annular sidewall 19 and a bottom 21 which is tapered downwardly toward a central socket 23 at the bottom of the cup 14. The socket 23 is sized and dimensioned to receive the ferrule 40 of the flag stick 12 therein and to hold the flag stick 12 in an upright orientation shown in FIGS. 1 and 3-5A.

[0024] The ball retrieval device 10 is coupled to the flag stick 12 by removing the banner 38 from the flag stick 12 and inserting upper end of the shaft 36 of the flag stick 12 first into and through the hole 34 in the boss 30 of the support member 26 and then into and through the hole 34 in the boss 32 of the handle 28. The banner 38 can then be re-attached to the upper end of the shaft 36 of the flag stick 12. Alternatively, the ferrule 40 on the flag stick 12 could be removed and the ball retrieval device 10 mounted to the lower end of the shaft 36 and then the ferrule 40 is re-attached to the shaft 36. Further alternative embodiments of the ball retrieval device 10 of this invention may utilize other mechanisms for coupling the ball retrieval device 10 to the flag stick 12, such as clips instead of through holes 34 on the support member 26 and/or handle 28.

[0025] As shown in FIGS. 3-5A, when the golfer 18 holes the ball 20 into the cup 14, the ball 20 is supported on the support member 26 in the cup 14 and just above the ferrule 40 of the flag stick 12. To retrieve the ball 20 from the cup 14, the golfer 18 hooks the head 42 of the putter 20 under the projection 48 as shown in FIG. 4 and lifts the putter 20 and engaged ball retrieval device 10 upwardly as shown by arrow A in FIG. 4. The ball retrieval device 10 slides along the shaft 36 of the flag stick 12 as the flag stick 12 remains seated in the cup 14 until the ball 20 supported on the support member 26 clears the cup 14 and rolls onto the green 16 as shown by arrow B in FIG. 5. The golfer 18 then releases the putter head 42 from the grip of the ball retrieval device 10 and allows the ball retrieval device 10 to slide back down the shaft 36 of the flag stick 12 until the support member 26 is seated once again in the cup 14 awaiting the next golf ball 20 to fall into the cup 14.

[0026] It will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that the handle 28 and/or projection 48 may take any of a variety of configurations, including a detent which allows the golfer 18 to more easily engage the ball retrieval device 10 with the putter head 42, a hole into which the head 42 can be inserted or other arrangements for the projection 48.

[0027] In an alternative embodiment as shown in FIG. 5A, the support member 26 includes a retainer which in one embodiment is an upwardly flared lip 50 around the circumference of the support member 26 to retain the ball 20 on the support member 26 once the support member 26 is lifted above the cup 14. As such, the golfer 18 may continue to lift the ball retrieval device 10 (arrow C) until he or she can grab the ball 20 directly from the support member 26. This may/will alleviate the need to bend over and grab the ball 20 from the green 16. The golfer 18 then releases the projection

48 of the ball retrieval device 10 and allows it to slide along the shaft 36 of the flag stick 12 until the support member 26 is seated in the cup 14.

[0028] With the various embodiments of this invention, the golfer 18 is able to retrieve a golf ball 20 from the cup 14 without bending over and/or touching the flag stick 12. Moreover, the existing flag stick 12 remains upright in the cup 14 throughout putting and ball retrieval. The ball retrieval device 10 may be rotated about the shaft 36 of the flag stick 12 to hide the stem 24 of the ball retrieval device 10 behind the shaft 36 of the flag stick 12 and opposite from the golf ball 20 approaching the cup 14 to avoid interference by the ball retrieval device 10 with the putt and ball 20 approaching the cup 14.

[0029] From the above disclosure of the general principles of this invention and the preceding detailed description of at least one embodiment, those skilled in the art will readily comprehend the various modifications to which this invention is susceptible. Therefore, we desire to be limited only by the scope of the following claims and equivalents thereof.

We claim:

1. A golf ball retrieval device for retrieving a golf ball from a cup with a flagstick extending upwardly from the cup, the device comprising:

- a support member adapted to sit within the cup and support the golf ball after the golf ball comes to rest in the cup;
- a stem projecting upwardly from the support member;
- a handle coupled to the stem a spaced distance from the support member above the cup and adapted to be engaged by a golfer with a putter to thereby lift the handle and support member from the cup with the golf ball supported on the support member; and
- an attachment mechanism to couple the support member and the handle to the flagstick for movement relative to the flagstick.

2. The device of claim 1 wherein the stem projects generally parallel to the flagstick.

3. The device of claim 1 wherein the handle is positioned at an upper end of the stem and the support member is positioned at a lower end of the stem.

4. The device of claim 1 wherein the attachment mechanism further comprises:

- a first portion proximate the support member; and
- a second portion proximate the handle.

5. The device of claim 4 wherein at least one of the first and second portions further comprises:

- a boss surrounding the flagstick with a hole in the boss through which the flagstick extends.

6. The device of claim 1 wherein the handle projects generally perpendicularly to the stem.

7. The device of claim 1 wherein the support member further comprises:

- a golf ball retainer adapted to retain the golf ball on the support member after the support member is lifted from the cup.

8. The device of claim 7 wherein the golf ball retainer further comprises:

- an upwardly directed lip extending around a circumference of the support member.

9. The device of claim 1 wherein the device is movable relative to the flagstick to retrieve the golf ball from the cup while the flagstick remains stationary in the cup.

10. A golf ball retrieval device for retrieving a golf ball from a cup with a flagstick extending upwardly from the cup, the device comprising:

- a support member adapted to sit within the cup and support the golf ball after the golf ball comes to rest in the cup;
- a stem projecting upwardly from the support member and generally parallel to the flagstick, the support member being coupled to the stem proximate a lower end of the stem;
- a handle oriented generally perpendicular and coupled to the stem proximate an upper end of the stem above the cup and adapted to be engaged by a golfer with a putter to thereby lift the handle and support member from the cup with the golf ball supported on the support member; and
- a first portion of an attachment mechanism coupled the support member and a second portion of the attachment mechanism coupled to the handle for movement of the device relative to the flagstick;

wherein the device is movable relative to the flagstick to retrieve the golf ball from the cup while the flagstick remains stationary in the cup.

11. The device of claim 10 wherein at least one of the first and second attachment mechanism portions further comprises:

- a boss surrounding the flagstick with a hole in the boss through which the flagstick extends.

12. The device of claim 10 wherein the support member further comprises:

- a golf ball retainer adapted to retain the golf ball on the support member after the support member is lifted from the cup.

13. The device of claim 12 wherein the golf ball retainer further comprises:

- an upwardly directed lip extending around a circumference of the support member.

14. A method for retrieving a golf ball from a cup on a putting green with a flag stick projecting from the cup, the method comprising the steps of:

- coupling a golf ball retrieval device to the flag stick with a support member of the golf ball retrieval device having a support member situated in the cup and a handle spaced from the support member and situated out of the cup;

engaging the handle with a putter;

lifting the golf ball retrieval device with the putter via the handle until the golf ball exits the cup;

retrieving the golf ball; and

releasing the handle from the putter thereby allowing the golf ball retrieval device to fall by gravity downwardly along the flag stick until the support member is situated in the cup;

wherein the method is accomplished while the flag stick remains stationary and upright in the cup.

15. The method of claim 14 further comprising:

rolling the golf ball off of the support member when the support member is out of the cup.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein the retrieving step further comprises:

retrieving the golf ball from the putting green after the rolling step.

17. The method of claim **14** further comprising:
retaining the golf ball on the support member after the
support member has exited the cup.

18. The method of claim **17** wherein the retrieving step
further comprises:
retrieving the golf ball from the support member after the
support member has exited the cup.

19. The method of claim **18** wherein the lifting step
further comprises:

lifting the support member with the golf ball thereon to at
least waist height for a golfer handling the putter.

20. The method of claim **14** wherein the coupling step
further comprises:

inserting a shaft of the flag stick through a first hole in the
support member and a second hole in the handle.

21. The method of claim **20** further comprising:

removing one of a banner on a first end of the flag stick
and a ferrule on a second end of the flag stick prior to
the inserting step; and

re-installing the one of the banner and the ferrule onto the
flag stick.

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