

# The Origin of the 'Greatest Logo In Golf'

*Former Merion Head Professional Bill Kittleman revisits how he created what many call "the greatest logo in golf."*

By Nate Oxman  
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It's hard to believe that when Bill Kittleman came to Merion in the early '60s, some of the members didn't even know what their club logo was.

But this was a different time. Embroidered golf shirts weren't very popular at all and as Kittleman, who served as an assistant at Merion from 1963 to 1970 and head professional from 1970 to 1996, puts it, "no one really paid any attention at all," to the logo.

Surely the fact that the golf apparel industry was in its infancy, at least as far as embroidery was concerned, played a major factor. But perhaps another reason is the club's original, completely ordinary emblem.

"I guess that when the golf club separated from the Merion Cricket Club and became a separate club, somebody, I don't know who, in 1941 or 1942 during the war I guess took the Merion Cricket Club emblem, which is a shield with a banner underneath, and took out the references to cricket and put in some golf references," said Kittleman. "They kept the shield the same and the banner underneath the same, with Merion Golf Club written in the banner, and inside the shield they put a golf bag, a club and a golf ball. And above the shield they put a sand box [once used to build tees to place one's golf ball on] and a flagstick leaning with the flag kind of blowing in the wind. So that was an adaptation of the cricket club's design. They just changed the symbols."

That shield, with features similar to probably hundreds of golf clubs all over the world, was embroidered mainly on ladies' shirts when Kittleman arrived at Merion in 1963.

"When I got there I had to sit down and draw up all new artwork," said Kittleman. "I took the main ribbon in the logo, which as far as embroidery was concerned, was impossible because it was so small. So we had a more advanced



The original Merion logo (above) and the Kittleman-designed current logo (right)

rendition done of that particular shield - this would have been around '65 when I drew that thing - and got that thing in production in the 60s before [former head professional] Freddie Austin left."

According to Kittleman the shield logo lasted until about 1975, when a member penned a letter asking why the club had a logo with a flag on it when Merion didn't use flags.

"I think that came out of the '71 Open because of all of the publicity the wicker baskets received after being on national TV," said Kittleman. "They made a big deal out of that and got everybody thinking about it I guess, even though in '66 we had the [U.S.] Amateur there and the baskets were used, but you didn't have the same television coverage of the tournament like at the Open.

Kittleman recalls ABC's broadcast crew of Byron Nelson and Dave Marr "making a big to-do over the wicker baskets."

"Therefore someone said, 'why are we using this logo?'" said Kittleman. "Why don't we investigate a new logo for the club? I never saw the letter and don't know exactly what the letter said, but I'm sure words to that effect were in there."

So Merion formed a committee and sought ideas from those outside the club regarding a new logo.

"I wasn't on this committee so I had no power over this, but I said, 'If you're going to entertain suggestions, I'll make a suggestion,'" said Kittleman. "So I drew this emblem with a wicker flagstick and I put a Scotch broom plant on there and a date on it. The committee liked it I guess better than anything else that was sent in so in about 1975 they officially decided to start using this design."

Kittleman had the sketch down, but he couldn't reproduce the Scotch broom plant well enough so he asked some local artists to create a "realistic rendition of the plant."

"There's not much to the plant," said Kittleman. "It's just a bunch of switches. It has no confirmation as far as a trunk and branches. The leaves are tiny. The buds are tiny. I wanted to get kind of a botanical drawing of it, but what they've done now is abstracted it into more of a silhouette. I don't think a Scotch broom plant is ever going to be a silhouette. And I think if you go in that direction, the thing begins to look like a leaf of some kind. I don't think it captures the feeling that I had, which is that I wanted this thing to be kind of wild and woolly."

Kittleman wanted it wild and woolly like the Scotch Broom that dots the quarry on Merion's 16th hole and is sprinkled throughout the golf course on



other holes as well.

"It goes with the course," Kittleman said of the broom. "I just thought it was interesting to me even though in many areas it's considered an obnoxious weed."

Kittleman liked the wicker-broom combination and the mystery the logo exudes with the absence of any text.

"I didn't think it should be enclosed in a circle or a square or a shield and I didn't want to put the name of the club on it and I didn't want to put any obvious symbols of golf," said Kittleman. "You could look at the logo now and not know what the heck it is. It's not obvious and that's another thing I liked about it."

Kittleman acknowledges that today, the world has gone logo crazy.

"Most logos don't have any detail," said Kittleman. "The hottest logo probably in the world is Apple and that's just a simple silhouette, although it's a wonderful logo because it can be printed as a positive or as a negative or it can be printed all the way down to like a cufflink or eye clip or the size of a penny and you would still recognize it.

You could also blow it up 4 feet across and put it on top of your storefront.

"I didn't think Merion should be that," said Kittleman. "That's a corporate approach that is very valuable to a company and is very flexible in its usage, but that's a corporation. It's a huge, huge thing and Merion is not a corporation, not a franchise, not a chain of golf courses. So I thought the emblem should be a literal presentation instead of an abstraction."

After Kittleman sketched his design, he again sought the expertise of local artists to finish the emblem.

"It's a combination of a couple of artists and I tweaked it a little bit here and there," said Kittleman. "I wanted it to look a little hand drawn, a little custom, like it was a little bit out of whack so it didn't look like it came right off of a drawing board using a T-square. But over the years they've redrawn it and simplified it for the purpose of easier production. I think that's happened. But if it's helping the club by doing that, that's fine."

Today, Merion's golf shop is one of

the highest-grossing in the business and Kittleman wonders if that can be attributed to his design or "...the fact that it represents the club."

"I think a lot of guests who visit Merion may or may not ever come back to play again," said Kittleman. "It may be their only shot. They've got all of the romance and the history of the course and they know it's special to be at Merion. It's a wonderful golf course and a wonderful club, but I don't know that the logo itself is all that great."

Many golfers would argue that it is, with some going so far as calling it, "...the best logo in golf."

"I don't know why exactly but I love the logo," said a recent guest. "On each of my two visits, I haven't made it out of the pro shop without spending over \$400. It's kind of embarrassing, actually. I have Merion logo fridge magnets, beer steins, a beer glass, sweater, wind jacket, hip flask, two hats and even a golf bag. If it wasn't for transportation issues, I am sure I would have bought the logo wine rack and bar stool. It's not the club. It's the logo." TSG

