

Aeration is not a passing fad but now a constant necessity

IN 40 years of greenkeeping, I have lived through the acid theory, the alkaline theory, lime recommendations from Bingley in the 1960s and '70s, the 'unable to afford' fertiliser time to the 'as much as you can afford' fertiliser time. There was the time when we used little or no water and the time when it was "give 'em as much water as you can," which was followed by the time when cutting back in water was again advised! Things in this business seem to go in cycles, writes Jack McMillan.

We have now reached a point in our history when another cycle is taking place. Over the last decade, everyone who is employed in the business of preparing and presenting golf courses has realised the importance of aeration. If courses are to become busier then, to keep a very natural structure, i.e. soil healthy, under very unnatural traffic, then we must be allowed to cultivate it.

Aeration programmes have caused so many problems for course management that there is now a move to temper the programmes in the interest of good club-member relations. I can again see a turning back of the clock to all the problems related to surface compaction, for there is nothing that can cause more aggravation, confrontation and pain among golfers than to see an aeration machine on the course.

I remember many years ago listening to an old American turf consultant from Miami, Tom

Mascaro, who said that man has known from early in time that if he stirred a soil with a stick, it became alive and plants thrived - early aeration, in fact.

Everyone in the business end of producing golf courses is aware that soil of any structure, whether it be on links, downs, parks or the varying types of heathland, requires aeration to remain healthy.

The machine trade, consultant agronomists, including the STRI, secretaries and greenkeepers are all aware of the importance of a healthy aeration programme. The only individual not aware of this is the paying customer, i.e. the golfer.

The machinery trade has gone to great lengths to produce good machines to carry out this work. Their responsibility finishes there - they take their money and go. I am sure we all, as greenkeepers, are delighted that these machines are available to us today.

The consultant agronomist, with one exception, gives excellent

advice and leaves the greenkeeper to get on with the painful business of applying the programme. Jim Arthur has, over the years, I am sure tried to get the message across to the paying customer, the golfer, not, I may add, without some pain in the process.

The club secretary is, like the greenkeeper, a bit nearer the scene of the crime. It is the secretary who is first in line when any complaints about the course arrive. It is his unfortunate role to justify the programme to the members. Hopefully, he will not be influenced into bringing pressure on the greenkeeper to reduce his programme.

The greenkeeper is the man in the firing line. It is he who is left to get on with the programme and carry it out. This part of the maintenance programme is the one that affects greenkeepers lives more than anything else. It removes him further from the person he is employed to please, i.e. the golfer.

Somewhere, somehow, we have to get the message across to the golfers that rather than it being a problem, aeration promotes his pleasure more than any other operation we carry out.

Without aeration, the benefits from fertilisers are lost, as it is pointless applying fertiliser to a compacted surface. Without aeration, the full value of wetting agents or irrigation systems is completely lost, leaving more serious problems from run off on proud areas, resulting in dry patch, or soft wet areas due to ponding in low areas, causing a stagnant rot. Without aeration, the course's ability to handle wet weather is also affected. Compacted surfaces do not let even normal drainage and infiltration rates work.

One of the more common comments greenkeepers receive is that the course is overplayed. Again, the message must be got over and it is that golf courses are for playing golf on, all the year round, as long as the prevailing weather conditions are right and



Two generations of McMillans - Jack with son Billy, one of five sons in the business.



Jack gets to grips with a Sunningdale green.

as long as we are allowed to aerate, compensating for the additional traffic.

Somehow we must find a way to carry out aeration programmes without disturbing the golfer. Every experienced greenkeeper knows that a well-aerated soil aerates well with little evidence of the work having been carried out.

The real problem lies in very compacted soils where aerators

leave obvious evidence of where they have been working, i.e. surface plucking and tear, causing unacceptable disturbance to putting surfaces.

I know of greenkeepers whose lives are made a misery for carrying out sensible greenkeeping programmes. Some lose their jobs. I know others who have become ill with worry about it. This problem has brought a measure of stress that was never

there before and the greenkeeper is the whipping boy.

The work has to be done and I would suggest it is tackled early in the week and as early in the morning as possible. What the golfer does not see, etc...

I would also suggest that greenkeepers obtain clear guidelines on what their club's policy is regarding sensible aeration, taking away some of the burden. Unfortunately, many I talk to have no guidelines whatsoever regarding policy in this matter.

Much as I am sure that we should let the golfer know what we are doing and why, I very much doubt if he wants to know. After all, he is out to enjoy a game of golf. It is possible that one of the pleasures of playing the game is the right to criticise the greenstaff. After all, one of my great pleasures is to see people enjoying playing the game on courses we have prepared for them.

● *Jack McMillan is the course manager at Sunningdale Golf Club and vice chairman of the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association.*

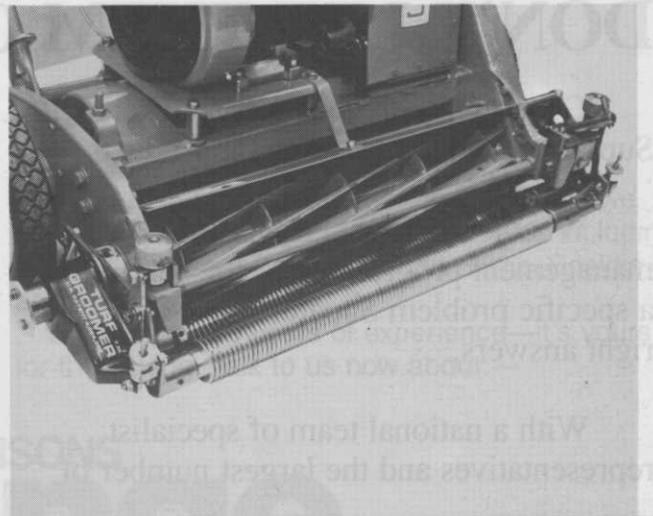
JACOBSEN HONOUR INVENTOR

The late Lawrence L. Lloyd, past member of the GCSAA and inventor of the Turf Groomer greens conditioner, was honored at a reception Sunday, February 1, held by Jacobsen Division of Textron Inc.

At the reception, John R. Dwyer, Jr., President of Jacobsen, presented Mrs. Barbara Lloyd with a plaque commemorating her husband's contributions to modern turf care equipment design.

Lloyd developed and tested the Turf Groomer over a period of two years. His primary goal was to combat fast thatch build-up on putting greens, but his invention proved to be beneficial in a number of ways. Improved green consistency, increased green speed without lowering cutting height, and improved control of broadleaf weeds, on green fringes were just a few of these additional benefits. Use of the greens conditioner, first introduced last year on the Greens King IV riding greens mower, has been shown to improve green health and consistency. Increases in green speed of as much as 25% have been achieved without lowering the cutting height.

Lloyd was vice president and superintendent at Rancho Canada Golf Club in Carmel, California. Jacobsen purchased his patent in 1985. As part of the patent purchase agreement, the Lloyd estate receives income from the sale of each Turf Groomer.



The Turf Groomer greens conditioner is now available on Jacobsen's standard and Championship walk-behind Greens Mowers.