



Cultural Practices

in a Changing Economy

By Joel Jackson

The hints of light at the end of the Wall Street tunnel, where rumors of the market bottoming out and making a slow comeback are positive signs for the big picture. Meanwhile on your Main Street – or rather Front and Back Nine – trimmed-down budgets have affected everything from manpower and wages to turfgrass management.

Many superintendents are working diligently and, hopefully, intelligently on ways to reduce costs and still produce acceptable playing conditions on the course. Cash flow runs the show, but the turf still needs holes punched and topdressing spread and grainy,

Verticutting is just one cultural practice that may need to be tweaked. Photo by Joel Jackson

thatchy greens need verticutting. The trick and the challenge is to know how to modify established cultural programs to keep the turf and the accounting department happy. Here are some comments and ideas from your peers.

SHANE BASS CGCS

St. James Bay GC, Carrabelle

The St. James Bay G.C. is tied directly into the real estate development on the property. With the hiccup in the housing market right now, we have had to downsize our staff by two-thirds, our work week to 34 hours and no overtime. Here are some of the adjustments we have made to our cultural practices keep the turf healthy and address budget cuts.

We used to verticut nine holes a day using a No. 1 or No. 10 tee start, but we are now closed on Mondays to save operating costs and doing all 18 holes in one day.

Until this year we had been

contracting out the aerifying but I decided we would try to do it in-house. We will still go three times this year, but the Ryan I purchased to do bad spots as needed will be doing all 21 greens. I do run a Planet-Air every two weeks on Mondays behind the verticutting for spiking purposes.

We usually walk-mow through the winter season, but with the reduced manpower this year we triplexed the greens all winter.

We lightly topdress (dust) the greens with sand also on Mondays. Then we roll them after the light dusting.

We work long days on Mondays so we get all the rough mowing done except three holes that we finish Tuesday morning. Still trying to mow tees and fairways three times a week but there have been a few times we only mowed on Tuesday and Friday just so we could get other things done like edging bunkers and cart paths.

We have never really had to change

cups every day since I have been here because of the amount of play. Now because of the manpower level, I change the cups and still base it on the amount of play, so it is usually only four times in seven days.

BILL KISTLER

Tampa Palms G&CC, Tampa

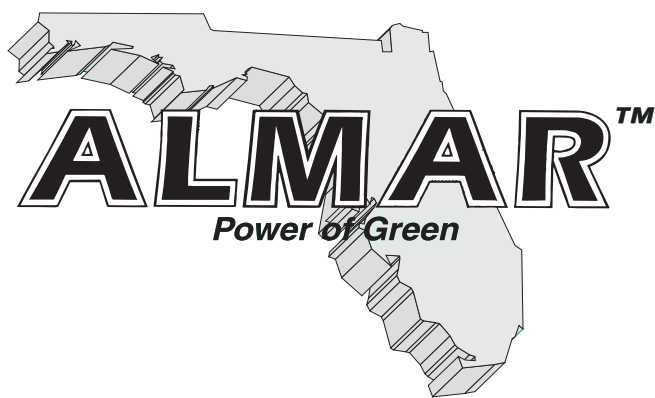
What is working for us is a weekly verticutting. We set the depth to just

scratch the surface of the soil. We always backtrack or return from opposite direction on same pass. That way we make sure any grain is taken out and the putting surface is more uniform.

We also try to topdress the same day we verticut. When topdressing, we let the sand dry if necessary, then roll in the sand instead of a light watering. By rolling in the sand there is less disruption to play, smoother ball roll,

and we increase greens speed by almost 12 inches. To apply the topdressing we use a Turfco 1530, and lightly spread about three loads for all 18 greens plus the putting green for a total of three acres.

We try to roll greens three times a week. Due to staff size we triplex greens daily and only mow a cleanup pass twice a week. Fairways and tees are treated with Primo monthly at 16 ounces per



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Aerification choices to be made - pull cores or just solid tine aerify? Photo by Joel Jackson

acre. That has also helped reduce the frequency of mowing to twice a week instead of three times.

Roy MacDonald

Hobe Sound GC, Hobe Sound

As of right now we have not altered our primary renovation schedule due to the decreased budget. We did alter our schedule and process due to the drought conditions in May. Our first spring aerification on the greens was with 3/8-inch tines, the next two will be with the usual 1/2-inch tines, pulling cores. We skipped our first tee aerification scheduled for May, but will get in two thorough corings before next fall. We use a Toro Pro core unit on the greens and a John Deere walking unit with 1/2-inch tines on the tees.

We have stayed with our normal greens verticutting schedule which is biweekly except for December, January and February. We also follow the practice of verticutting up and back

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on the same pass to get good thatch removal. The greens are topdressed bi-weekly during the season. We aggressively verticut the tees with a Graden walking unit as long as it is not too dry and follow up with a heavy topdressing.

On the fairways this year, we will aerify twice with 1/2-inch tines on a Verti-Drain Mustang unit. We will also verticut, scalp and sweep the fairways twice. One pass will be from the tee to green direction; the second will be across the fairway, side to side. We don't have the manpower to do much renovation in the roughs.

One greens-management item I did not touch on was Primo®. Tim Cann and I have greens of the similar age and the same nursery (Pikes Creek) Tim has 2004 and 2002 TifEagle greens and our course has 2003 TifEagle greens Tim and I speak on a regular routine as friends, golfers and fellow superintendents. Our HOC and other

cultural practices are pretty similar, although our budgets aren't but that's for another time. Anyway Tim started applying Primo® two times a week last summer on his greens. I have followed suit and it really helps us manage through the summer. We have just cored the greens May 18, to combat the fairy ring. I like to keep them really healthy; this is where the Primo® really helps. We sprayed this week on Tuesday and again on Friday at 4 oz/acre.

We have some fairy ring but the greens are so healthy we are currently outgrowing it. We are able to keep the HOC at .120 and keep the fertility levels up and growth rate at a manageable level due the Primo®.

STEPHEN FOX

Ocean Reef Club, Key Largo

Verticutting- During the season – November to April – verticutting is performed two or three times at a

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very shallow depth. The rest of the year verticutting is done weekly at usually .100-in. depth in two directions and double-mowed with brushes behind the verticuts. Deep verticutting is performed before aerifications

Aerification- To offset wear and compaction in golf season we quad-tine aerify monthly. During the warmer growing season, hollow-tine (5/8 inch) aerification is performed at 2 ft. x 2 in. spacing at a 4-in. depth in two directions two times in the summer. Aerify with 1/4-in. hollow-tines is performed also at 2 ft. x 2 in. spacing but only a 2-in. depth two times in the summer.

We own all of the equipment ourselves and all work is performed by my staff. We actually have increased our aerification program for this year.

We haven't really changed mowing practices or heights of cut in this area to date.

Rolling- We currently roll less than

in previous years; I have increased the rates of the growth regulator in place of rolling. It takes less labor to add growth regulator to the tank than to roll greens.

Topdressing- We use around 1,250 tons per year of greens/tees topdressing material. The fairways and approaches are topdressed annually with around 1,750–2,000 tons of sand.

Beginning this year we have added roughs to our topdressing plan, which will increase my sand use by 500-750 tons of sand. All sand is stored in concrete storage bins.

Other items- We have cut back nothing on our greens program and have actually added some practices in this area. The tee program has been reduced a little with fewer granular fertilizations and trying to use fertigation to push the tees longer. The mowing of tees has increased due to member request. Our fairway program has seen a slight increase in mowing

frequency and patterns. Fertilization remains the same.

My chemical program has seen an increase, mainly due to the changes I have made in my pre-emergent program. The overall program has been reduced as far as fertilizer inputs.

The staffing levels are where my biggest savings/cuts have come. I reduced overtime during season in half, and removed almost all overtime during summer months from the budget. We also didn't hire three staff members this year, and have requested that all members of the staff use all vacation time available to them. This has been the most difficult part when dealing with members' expectations. They remember years past when some things were not issues, and now they are not performed as often. The frequency of our edging, landscape maintenance, and small detail jobs have suffered the most.

One of the things I do is to

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constantly research products, materials, equipment to find the best and most economical items I can for my club. Thresholds have been set to allow certain things; once these are exceeded we do whatever is needed, while trying to stay within the confines of a reduced budget.

STEVE PEARSON CGCS

The Falls CC, West Palm Beach

Although we endured many budget cutbacks we did not cut out any major cultural practices with the exceptions I will note below. Verticutting - We will double verticut fairways (contracted out) in August as we usually do. Greens are verticut (groomed - not deep) virtually every other week at the least during the summer unless it gets too hot and would stress the turf. But we are grooming more than verticutting. No verticutting done from December to April. Tees are verticut heavily

(deep) once in the summer. No roughs are done.

Aerification - Greens done in May with 1/4-in. open tines, June with 1/2-in. open tines, July again with 1/4-in. small tines, late September with 1/2-in. open tines. Plugs are dragged in, debris blown off. The large-tine aerification is contracted out. Tees are done three times during the summer with at least 1/2-in. tines. Fairways are done three times during the summer with 3/4-in. tines very aggressively, going 6 inches deep. All this is done in-house on everything unless noted. All other areas are aerified three times during the summer - green slopes, tee slopes, approaches and collars. Roughs are not done at all. Not a budget cut; just no equipment to do it.

HOC - greens .100 in. for the Future of Golf Tournament in June. The HOC goes back to .110 in. for most of the summer unless there are heat related stress problems. All

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SUPER TIP

Containment for Portable Sprayers

By Darren Davis

Whether for environmental considerations or cost reduction, spot treatment has become standard procedure for today's golf course manager. As part of our risk analysis we determined that when transporting our one-gallon, 15-gallon or backpack sprayers in utility vehicles, there is potential for spillage, which would be wasteful as well as potentially damaging to turfgrass and/or the environment. To reduce this risk at Olde Florida Golf Club we transport our spray equipment in 50-gallon Rubbermaid Roughneck® storage containers. The containers are 42.7 x 21.4 x 18 inches which accommodate our 15-gallon, 12-volt electric sprayers. Should a leak occur in a sprayer, all of the material would be contained in the plastic storage box and could



A 50-gallon storage container eliminates the risk of leaks from portable sprayers. Photo by Darren Davis.

then be transferred into another sprayer for continued application. The container can also be rinsed and all rinseate can be poured into spray equipment for proper disposal. The cost of the container is around \$20.00.

greens are mowed with hand walkers. I refused to go to triplexes and Green Committee approved. We skip clean-up ring about four times per week at least. Not a budget cut; just don't want the wear. We will raise height to .125 in. in the winter if it gets cold and sometimes won't mow greens for three or four days as when we got cold this year. We roll greens when necessary to get speed up or a lot after aerifying to smooth them out faster. Tees are cut at 3/8 in. during growing part of year, 1/2 in. when it gets cold. Fairways mowed at 1/2 in. all year. Keep reels sharp! Rought heights vary from 1.25 in. to 1.5 in. Our biggest change in mowing due to budget cuts was the frequency of mowing areas like the green slopes, approaches and tees.

Topdressing - We topdress greens religiously at least once every two weeks with the same mix that we used to build the greens only there is no organic material in it (GASH #304). More sand of course after aerifying.

The members expect even better conditions than last year even though our labor was cut. Several staff members were let go so they could be replaced with temporary laborers to save on overhead like taxes, insurance and benefits. Of course, it is difficult

to tell at this point how much we will suffer from a 'lesser competent' employee. These changes were made in late April.

FRANK SBARRO, La Gorce GC, Miami

We have made no changes to our basic program.

Verticutting – In the summer we verticut the greens biweekly at a depth of 1/8 in. The fairways are done in August at 3/4-in. depth.

Aerification – The greens are done with solid tines every two weeks from November to May. In May and July we pull 1/2-in. cores and in August 3/8-in. cores. We contract the aerification for all but fairways and tees which are done in house two times per year with 5/8-in. tines in May and July

Height of cut and mowing - Greens are mowed at .110 in. daily with cleanup pass five times per week.

Rolling Greens – We double roll on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Topdressing - We topdress greens twice per month May through November and once per month from December to April.

We did cut back on a few things to lower overtime by 40 percent. Our club

is totally focused on the golf course as its most valued asset; therefore we are operating as usual in regards to the maintenance of the course. Capital expenses are on hold until our member dues renewal in September of 2009. After that point we will reevaluate our strategies.

MIKE STEM, CGCS The Legacy Club at Alaquia Lakes Longwood (Champion Greens)

Verticutting – Greens are weekly verticut/groomed with verticut blades set at 0 below roller.

Aerification - Greens are done with 5/8 in. in May, 1/2-in. tines in August and 1/4-in. quad-tines in September. We power slice with a Planetaire every three weeks in growing season and twice in the winter. Height of cut and mowing – We hand-mow greens in the winter and triplex in summer. We walk-mow perimeters all year. No overseeding in the winter, HOC is .140 in. in cool season, .100 in. in spring, and .140 in. in the summer. Rolling - Three days per week rolling pin placement locations except for special events. The greens are topdressed monthly in winter, weekly in the summer and every two weeks in the spring and fall.