**Blenders making crucial difference in greens**

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"Contractors are more quality-conscious than they were before... Plus, players are more demanding - there's a lot more traffic, and members want shorter grass and firmer greens" — so more perfect conditions are required.

"Everybody's looking for perfection," Fazio said. "If an owner doesn't get perfection, then he blames the contractor, who blames the architect for recommending the mix. If it's a matter of who does not want to get sued..."

Faulks said that while most blending is done for the root-zone on greens, there have been more calls to mix for tees the last couple of years. "The sports turf field is also taking a harder look at blending now," she said.

When a golf course is under construction, the architect has a soil laboratory test the sand and other material to be used in the root-zone mixture. The lab recommends the mix — say, eight parts sand to two parts sphagnum/peat moss.

Fazio recalls when he worked with his uncle George and the firm bought the first four Royer shredders built by The Toro Co. in the early 1960s, then used them to mix soil.

"Using a front-end loader, we would premix the soil — sand, peat moss and topsoil. We premixed it in a front-end loader to the lab's specs, and would actually pick the soil up and roll it around three or four times before we would put it in the shredder. Then it would come out as uniform as you could ever get it — in those days."

"It's humanly impossible to blend every day in exactly the same way with a front-end loader," Faulks said, adding, "When the contractor is done, you've got 18 greens that could be totally different in physical characteristics — standing water in one, perciling like a sieve in another. So the owner spends more for maintenance than if he had it done properly in the first place."

"With our equipment, we guarantee the accuracy of a blend at plus or minus 1 percent. That takes the liability right off the contractor and puts it with the professional that's in the business."

Fazio said a builder must recommend USGA specifications to a client as the client's first choice. In his case, 70 to 75 percent of the owners decide to use a blender.

The blending companies send their crews, with equipment and mobile homes sometimes, across the country, some following golf course builders from job to job.

In fact, McNeill's equipment even includes porculation testing gear so that his crews can test the mix every 15 minutes to an accuracy "within one to four percent of the labs."

An 18-hole course normally uses 7,000 to 10,000 tons of materials, which takes four to five days to blend, Faulks said.

**Dakota Peat defies the odds, scientists testify**

By Mark Leslie

While soil blenders are normally considered a necessary evil by golf course construction spokesmen for university athletic departments, football teams and racetracks agree at least one peat on the market needs no blender.

They say Dakota Peat is so fine and mixes so well with sand that it can be blended by front-end loader with the same accuracy as a mechanical blender.

Mike Powell, construction administrator for the University of Florida at Gainesville, hired a blender to mix Dakota Peat for the new Ben Hill Griffin Stadium. When the university builds its 2-1/2 new practice fields, Powell will most likely bucket-mix Dakota and sand, he said.

"K.W. Brown (laboratory) and Powell (Gaines at Tifton Laboratories) were enthusiastic in recommending Dakota Peat as a superior product. My paid agronomist and two volunteer agronomists agreed it was the one to use," Powell said.

Since the Griffin Stadium field was built, the mix has lived up to expectations.

Louisiana State University and Mississippi State University representatives "were amazed at the condition of the field" when they visited it after three successive home games, Powell said. "It was worn but not destroyed."

Ross Kurcab, turf manager at the Denver Broncos training facility which used Dakota Peat for its two full-size and one half-size workout field, said a few months after construction: "We have 10 inches of roots already, which is amazing. And it has held water way better than I thought it would. It mixed beautifully. It rates out at 97 percent organic."

"We did exhaustive research. Everyone I talked to that used reed-sedge just love it."

At Santa Anita racetrack in Los Angeles, rebuilt with Dakota Peat, five speed records were broken in the first 30 days.

Soil scientist Chuck Dixon, formerly with K.W. Brown and now at International Sports Turf Research Center, Inc. in Olathe, Kansas, said: "Dakota Peat is really different from other reed-sedge peats. A lot are really much... I have not seen anything that compares with Dakota Peat."

"The only thing close to Dakota's carbon-to-nitrogen rate is city sludge, but that is loaded with heavy metals or ash. Every bag of Dakota I've gotten has been clean as a whistle. I haven't seen any that blend as well."

Dixon said a "hidden difference" with Dakota is the resulting depth of root systems and the economy of the greens built with it. He said: "Santa Anita had nine-inch root

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Pioneer unveiling three blenders

Pioneer Peat, Inc. President Mike Pierce has announced that his company is manufacturing two models of compact soil blenders, and is designing a third, that will sell for a fraction of the cost of other equipment on the market and make it possible for golf courses and other facilities to buy their own machines. "These will make blending more affordable," Dixon said. "They are designed for any contractor or sand company that needs to blend. And the baby blender that we're working on, which we hope to have at the (GCSSA) Las Vegas show, will be sized and priced so every golf course or sports turf facility can have its own, just like mowers."

The larger models are the two-hopper "Dakota 2200" and three-hopper "Dakota 3200." Pierce said 90 percent of all mixing jobs use one type of sand and one other material. The 2200 model — measuring 8-1/2 feet wide by 20 feet long and 10 feet high and selling in the $33,000 range — has two hoppers and its own stacker. It can be hauled behind a pickup truck and is powered from a tractor's PTO. The 3200, measuring 17 feet long, has three hoppers and its own payloader. It can be hauled with a trailer and is powered by a truck's hydraulic unit.

The 1200 "baby" will probably measure around eight feet long by five feet wide and high and cost around $8,000, Pierce said.

Pierce, whose firm has headquarters in Grand Forks, N.D., and Mesa, Ariz., said the biggest complaint he hears is that "certain golf courses want a mix (of sand and peat) that's not available in their area. With their own blender, they can have small portions of the materials they want when they're available and do the blending themselves."