A new technique to an old problem: divot repair in the North

By FRANK DOBIE

In 1990, at the direction of O’Neil, our president, we initiated divot repair of tees and fairways with “divot mix containers” mounted on each golf car. Although filling divots from car-mounted containers is standard procedure on Southern courses, not much has been done in the North.

Until this time, we asked players to replace their turf divots. Divots that did not live, or were not replaced, were filled with a top dressing mix by the golf course staff. Tee divots were filled on a regular basis and fairways were done when we had time.

At first, I resisted the idea of divot mix containers on the golf cars because I did not like the bucket-and-scoop method. I had played at clubs that used the buckets and scoops and found them to be messy. The divot mix was scattered on the cars from careless use. Scoops were regularly lost. The open-top buckets allowed the mix to get wet, making it difficult to dispose. Players tended to scoop out too much mix and overfill the divot hole. They also would throw it down at the divot, sometimes missing the hole.

Not only was the process messy but the excess mix would cause damage to the mowers’ cutting blades.

On Southern courses the divot mix contained perennial ryegrass seed that can be used on tees, fairways and roughs. In the North, however, we use bentgrass seed on tees and fairways but do not want it planted in the rough. I was very concerned that unaware players might fill divots in the rough.

After looking at a variety of buckets and scoops, we finally found a plastic bottle dispenser made by Club Car. The bottle holder mounts easily on the car. It is neat in appearance and is easy to use. The pouring spout opening is small enough to prevent sudden water from dashing the mix. We purchased several and asked a few conscientious members to test the procedure. The results were very positive. We sent instructions to the membership in a monthly newsletter. Occasionally, we find a few players over-filling the divot holes, so reminder notices are needed. Since tee and fairway turf are the only areas that are to be repaired with this method, the membership must be informed never to use the mix in the rough.

At first, we put only one dispenser on each car. We soon discovered that we needed a bottle on each side of the car for the program to be really effective.

DIVOT MIX PREPARATION

1. 30 gal. top dressing mix of silica sand, mason sand and peat.
2. 10 lbs. Isolite (for added moisture-holding capacity)
3. 2 cups bentgrass seed
4. 3 lbs. (12/4/14) slow-release fertilizer

The top dressing is spread on asphalt to dry in the sun. The fertilizer, Isolite and seed are mixed in a rake. It is critical that the mixture be absolutely dry so that it pours easily from the divot mix bottles.

The dry mix also prevents the bentgrass seed from germinating prematurely in the containers. If the mix is moist, it does not pour easily and the players will not use it.

A 30-gallon, closed container of mix is kept outside the pro shop, where the clubs are unloaded. The bag boys fill the divot mix bottles on each car when they come in from play.

Tip the spout down at a 45-degree angle and gently shake the bottle from side to side over the divot hole. This produces a controlled flow of the mix into the hole. Fill the hole about 80 percent full and then step down on the mix. Do not overfill the hole because any sand mix that is higher than the soil line will contact and dull the mower’s cutting blades.

We ask players to discard the turf divot in the nearby rough or place it on the floor of the golf car. We will be experimenting with a small plastic container mounted on each car for old divots and other debris.

The divot mix not only levels the surface but it is an effective way of establishing bentgrass into poa annua turf. It eliminates the unsightly dead turf divot. It promotes fast turf recovery.

The dispenser bottle is so handy and easy to use that players seem to prefer it to walking forward to pick up and replace their turf divot. We see a higher percentage of divots repaired now than ever before.

Staff man-hours are much less with this method. Most of all, it heightens the players’ awareness of divot repair and gives them an active role in maintaining a finer course.

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