By MARK LESLIE

ORLANDO, Fla. — Want to put a nice "finish" on your sand bunkers? Check out the "broomed" traps at Grand Cypress Golf Club. But beware, warns superintendent Tom Alex, once golfers play out of them, they won't want to go back to hand-raked bunkers ever again.

Taking an idea from former assistant Steven Sorrell and working with shop manager B.J. Spinks, Alex has modified a John Deere bunker rake, putting a weighted broom, that is hinged and floats, on the back. Voila! Sand bunkers that are consistent and without furrows.

"As a golfer you get real spoiled [by these bunkers]," Alex said. "You can really put a nice finish on them with the brooms."

The brooms, he said, "create consistency."

The biggest problem with regular bunker rakes is the furrow they make, he said. "For one golfer, the ball might sit up and be perfect. For the next guy, the ball might be in the furrow. So you get inconsistency within each bunker. Also, the correct bunker is designed so balls get to the flat portion. Nobody wants an uphill lie on a steep face. So you want a firm surface so when a ball lands in the bunker, it trickles all the way down and doesn't get hung up in a furrow."

When Grand Cypress used the brooms for the Chrysler tournament last fall, "it worked well," Alex said. "Now we've incorporated it into our maintenance practice."

The idea came about one day when Sorrell, who is now superintendent at Colleton River Plantation in Bluffton, S.C., "was playing around with a little push broom and said, 'Boy, that's a great finish.' We just took it one step further," Alex said.

Experimenting with brushes of different widths, Alex decided 24- or 18-inch are best. No wider, he said, "because as you work the faces, with too wide a broom you start bridges and you might be working the ends and not the middle."

It takes about the same time to groom a bunker as with a regular rake, Alex said. The only drawback with the broom method, he said, is that some bunkers may firm up too hard because maintenance crews are working less than the top half inch of sand. "So wet bunkers, especially, can get hard," he said. "We just watch them. If they start to form up, we go back to the regular tractor manufacturer's rake for awhile. And we hear gripes about it when we do."

Alex said the brooms can be used the majority, if not 100 percent, of the time. "It works well in our sand. But it depends on different situations," he said. "It won't work so well in wet or powdery sand. In the Northeast it's a lot different. But it's easy to find out. Just experiment with a hard bristle push broom."

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