

# Aerification Produces Healthier Golf Courses

*Golfers Grumble...But Advise Them of Long-Term Benefits*

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*(Ed. Note: Following is a column written by James Stammer, a sports columnist for the Port St. Lucie News in Florida. It is reprinted by permission from the Stuart News/Port St. Lucie (Fla.) News.)*

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The time has arrived.

The moment when golfers across our area cause the ears of every greenkeeper and superintendent in town to burn with a fiery glow. Within the next several weeks every course in the area will undergo aerification as courses ready themselves for the busy winter season.

Nearly every golfer, myself included, despises this practice. It always seems that just when the course is at its best, that is the time for major work to be done. We all hate putting on aerified greens and blame the little holes for every missed putt.

When you look at the long-term benefits, however, it's easy to understand why aerification is a necessary long-term evil. Just as any good car owner would change the oil in his or her car to prevent future problems, the golf course superintendent uses aerification as a form of maintenance.

Aerification is an integral part of a successful golf course management plan. The job of every superintendent not only is to make the course look fabulous today, but also tomorrow and down the road.

It's important for everyone to understand how important aerification is to producing healthy turf and a healthy golf course in the future. Aerification achieves three major objectives:

- First, it relieves soil compaction.
- Second, it provides a method for improving soil mixture around the highest part of the grass root system.
- Finally, it reduces or prevents the build-up of thatch.

When golfers by the thousand walk on the greens and drive carts on the fairways, the traffic causes the soil near the surface to compact into a hard layer. Over time, the soil becomes so tightly compacted that water and air have a difficult time penetrating the surface to reach the root system of the grass.

Once this begins to occur, the roots decline, the turf becomes weak and disease and other problems begin to appear. Aerification pulls plugs from the compacted soil, allowing an infusion of life-sustaining water and air to reach the roots and bring about a resurgence of growth.

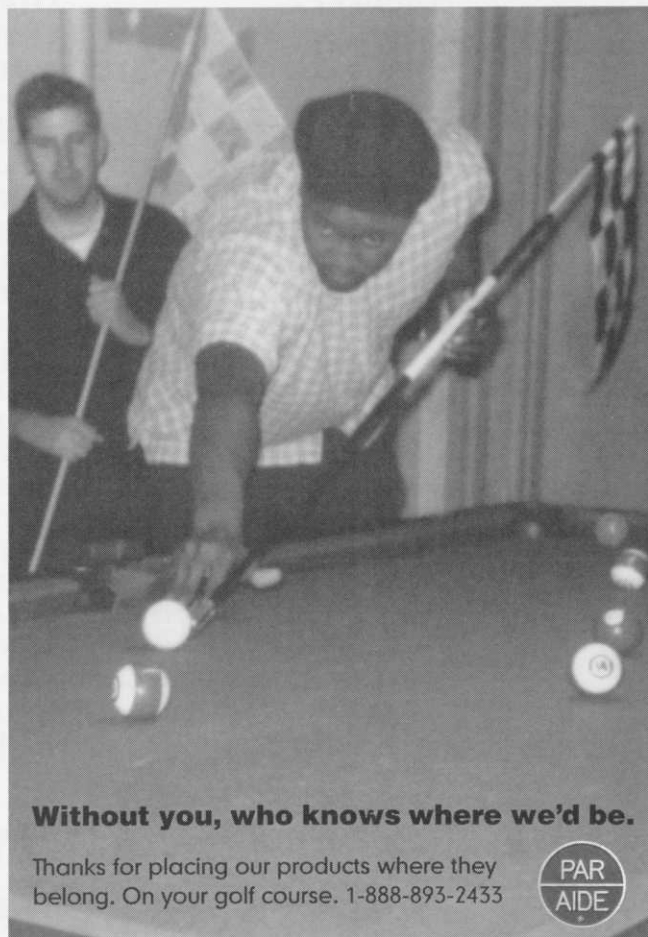
On the greens, the holes are filled with a sandy topdressing that drains well and resists compaction. By introduc-

ing this sandy topdressing periodically, a superintendent improves the green's top layer and helps avoid the expense of rebuilding or renovating the green.

The growth of turf adds to the protective layer of organic material on the surface. This layer, called thatch, is an accumulation of dead grass, leaves, stems and roots. A strong and healthy thatch layer helps the turf recover faster from divots and cart tracks, and it helps prevent the intrusion of insects and disease.

The newest aerification machines use smaller tongs to pull plugs from the greens. These smaller holes help the green to heal faster and allow the superintendent to get a better dispersion of top dressing.

So before you trash your superintendent the next time you see him gassing up the aerification machines, remember that he is only trying to give you the best golf course, now and in the future.



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