



Within the Leather

by David Kazmierczak, CGCS

The sign saying “Golf Course” with a simple arrow pointing the way off Highway 385

was in sight. It was another glorious morning in the Black Hills of South Dakota on a slow Tuesday morning. The entire family was packed into our minivan, and it was last day of our short vacation to visit my parents who reside in this wonderful part of the world.

As we turned into the parking lot I could make out a small machine on the first fairway at Tomahawk Country Club. Now, Tomahawk Country Club is the local course for Deadwood, South Dakota. It is quaint little nine-hole course open to the public all the time. The only thing “country club” about it is it’s out in the country, and it’s a golf club. Nothing else. It is the course my grandparents took me to play when we visited as a kid, and I guess it really was the course I grew up on, if there was one, so today was going to be kind of special as I hadn’t played the course in quite some time.

After parking, the small machine suddenly looked quite lager as it made its

way to the first tee. Indeed it was a turf vehicle with a core sweeper attached. They had aerified the first and ninth fairways, visible from the clubhouse.

“Crap,” I thought as I mentioned it out loud to the minivan’s passengers. I related to all that we could go play somewhere else if desired but, as always, the decision fell upon my narrow shoulders on whether or not to still play at Tomahawk. Not wanting to be the guy I have become to detest, you know, the guy who always whines at you when you aerify at your course, I decided we could tough it out, no big deal, that’s what I always tell our pro shop.

“Really, it’s just cores, all they have to do is shoo then out of the stance and roll the ball, no big deal,” is always my pat answer.

We loaded everybody up, paid our green fees and off we went. After teeing off and looking at the area swept up already two observations popped into my head. The first was that in two weeks, I would be doing the exact same thing and the other was that it was far too early in the day for these guys to be using that sweeper! The fairway had turned to a mud bowl. If the guy was sweeping anything, it was an upset. Most of the cores were simply being smeared all over the fairway. I think he figured

it out pretty quickly as he was still sweeping after we were done playing 18 at a much better success rate but initially what we had was a family half covered with mud and questioning my judgment on the second tee. I quickly told all concerned to chill out, scrape their shoes, and it was going to be a fine, fun filled day. Or I would drive back to the pro shop, get our money back and go home. Not my folks place-home!

Idle threats had always worked for my dad- and I guess I learned from the best as everybody did chill out, and we did have a good day. As we came around to the ninth, another worker had a Cushman and a core harvester slowly trying to clean the fairway. The word harvest in bold bright letters reminded me of something very important. That no matter what scale of golf course maintenance you are in charge of- high end multi-course facility or small country nine-hole or executive tract- we are all really simple farmers in the end. Our crop is grass, and while we may grow it differently than our agricultural brethren, we still have the basic programs and worries as they do. We are at the mercy of Mother Nature always, and have good crop years and bad.

Which leads me to the ultimate point I want to make. How many farmers do you know- other than our group of grass farmers? I know a couple very well. My father in law was

a farmer, my brother in law is a farmer. I have met many of their peers, many of whom are relatives. I have meet plenty of other farmers throughout my years on this orbiting rock to know that everyone I have ever met has one undeniable trait: they are humble people. Time has taught these folks from generation to generation that in order to succeed long term one must be humble in ones abilities, for you are only as good as your last crop and a lot of your success or failure is out of your hands.

This has been an outstanding agronomic year in our region for “grass farmers.” I, and our crew, have been gathering bouquets most of the summer from members and non-members alike. It is easy to let the atta-boys go to your head and start thinking you are God’s gift to turf and golf. Forget it mister (and missus). You are a lowly grass farmer. Nothing more, nothing less. (Ok- maybe a little more, but you get my point.)

With the dog days of August over and all of us shifting into aerification mode and easing into fall and the ugliness that follows, this is a gentle reminder to keep diligent, keep humble, and keep farming the best crop a guy or gal can have the privilege of farming: precision golf turf. Happy growing!