

## Some Dos And Don'ts As The Golf Season Approaches

By Keith Happ, regional director, Northeast Region

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*Patience Everyone!!*

Most golfers are chomping at the bit to get out and play some golf. Television golf has teased those who are still waiting for the snow to melt, the ground to thaw, and the grass to start growing. Golf course superintendents are cleaning up winter debris and getting ready to implement programs to get the playing surfaces ready for what many golfers hope is an active season of golf. Remember, no matter how much golfers and superintendents want to get going, we just can't rush Mother Nature.

Many superintendents have taken full advantage of winter opportunities to complete projects out on the golf course. For example, superintendents have topdressed aggressively during breaks in the winter weather. Golfers, don't be surprised if you see some sand on the greens when your course is opened for play. The sand provides protection for the grass and many other agronomic benefits. There may be some minor negative effects on playing quality, but these will be short lived. When the weather allows, the grass will grow and the sand will be incorporated into the turf canopy.

It is important that superintendents implement early season programs when they are most productive. For example, don't rush to mow unless there is a real need. That first mowing will initiate a growth response and remove any lingering pink snow mold (*Microdochium* patch) protection from the grass. We don't need



*While aeration may cause short-term disruption of a putting green (note the footprinting), plant health benefits are the result. Spring aeration of greens is a necessary practice.*

snow to have an outbreak of pink snow mold. Rolling greens can be used to smooth the surfaces for the short term. It won't be long before regular mowing schedules are used on all parts of the course, but don't expect mid-season conditions until mid-spring.

If your operation is short-handed because of labor reductions, be realistic about what can be achieved during early spring. Focus on the center lines of the course and work toward the perimeter as time and



***When it comes to capital expenditures, there is no better utilization of funds than investing in the golf course infrastructure. Prioritizing the use of capital expenditures can bring about some debate, but investing in the golf course is critical to its short- and long-term sustainability.***

and resources permit. Bunkers may have to wait until after the more important areas of the course are cleaned and readied for play. There may be a few sticks in the rough (all covered by the Rules of Golf) until these areas can be cleaned and prepared, similar to the rest of the course. Superintendents and their crews are prioritizing maintenance needs to provide satisfactory playing conditions.

After a long winter, foundational maintenance strategies need to be implemented to prepare the turf for the variable summer weather that Mother Nature brings. Do not defer important

maintenance needs this spring. Programs are not performed to inconvenience golfers, but rather to prepare for and deliver consistent playing quality when it really counts -- in the summer.

#### *Upcoming Regional Conferences*

We look forward to seeing you at our regional conference at Woodholme CC in Baltimore, Maryland on March 15.

The Mid-Atlantic Region agronomists are part of our agronomic support team. If you have a question or concern, give us a call or send an e-mail. Stan Zontek ([szontek@usga.org](mailto:szontek@usga.org)) and Darin Bevard ([dbevard@usga.org](mailto:dbevard@usga.org)) at 610-558-9066 and Keith Happ ([khapp@usga.org](mailto:khapp@usga.org)) at 412-341-5925.

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