

This survey, produced for the Berkshire College Greenkeeping Liaison Committee by Ray Clark, Course Manager of Harleyford Golf Club and Martin Gunn, Course Manager of Temple Golf Club and the BB&O Section, underlines the need for better communication and education of golfers ...

Aeration survey digs deep

It was planned that the foundation of this review would make use of Head Greenkeepers/ Course Managers considerable local knowledge and experience, acknowledge their recommendations and identify whether or not their proposals were being utilised fully by their employers. If not, the survey was designed to seek their opinions as to why their suggestions were being overlooked.

Our intention was to contact and question at least 50% of the Head Greenkeepers! Course Managers within the Berks, Bucks and Oxon (BB&O) region. 105 affiliated golf clubs were identified, with 62 clubs actually targeted for the survey. It was agreed by the survey team that although the number of clubs taking part would not provide conclusive proof, 65% represented a large enough

number (and therefore the evidence) to provide a good indication of what was happening within the industry.

The survey was to be carried out somewhat covertly, under the pretext of Berkshire Colleges-Industrial Liaison Committee and was therefore not able to use such direct questioning as perhaps would be required.

Aim

The main aim of the survey was to gain insight as to what is considered the correct amount of aeration (for individual golf courses) as perceived by Head Greenkeepers/Course Managers.

Along with this, the survey was designed to highlight which areas of conflict (if any) were most often encountered and how that conflict impacted on aeration objectives and scheduling.

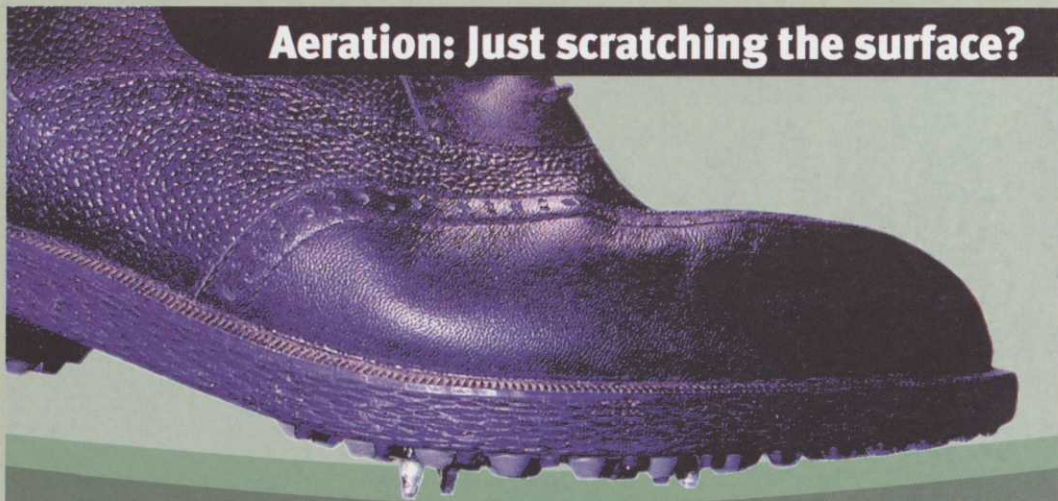
Implementation

It was felt that the most effective way to achieve the high level of responses required, would be to conduct a telephone survey. A wide variety of clubs (from PGA tournament venues to local authority) were surveyed during the first two weeks of February. From the 62 clubs targeted a success rate of 100% was achieved. Please refer to the graphs for our findings.

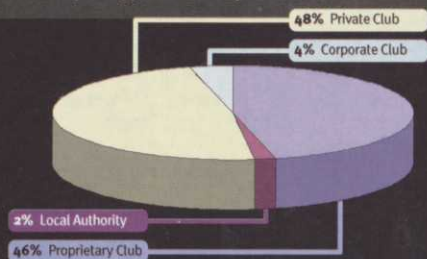
Discussion

There appears to be a very accurate match of information gained from Questions 1 and 2. The link between those facilities playing on pure sand greens and the percentage of corporate clubs surveyed is too obvious to ignore. Likewise, the links between soil greens and private clubs and

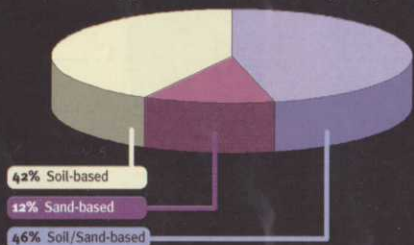
Aeration: Just scratching the surface?



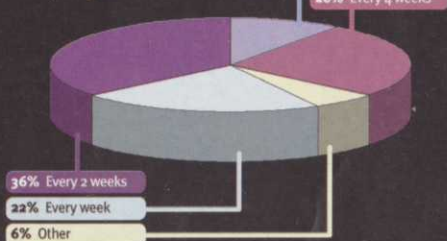
1. What type of club do you work at?



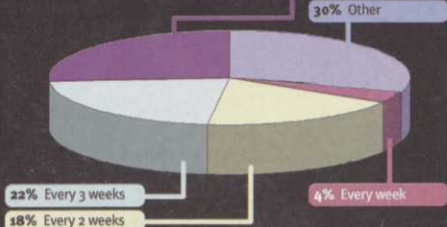
2. What type of soil best describes your greens?



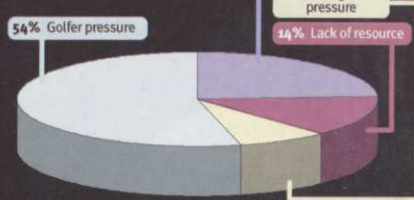
3. How frequently do you feel your greens should be aerated?



4. How often do you actually aerate your greens?



5. Why do you not aerate your greens as often as you'd like?



6. List the aeration methods in order of frequency used by you



7. Are golfers notified of your aeration programme?



8. Do you receive enough support from your industry to achieve your aeration objectives?



sand/soil greens and proprietary clubs are also similar.

Given the information so far, it would be fair to suggest that Questions 3 and 4 would clearly identify the frequency of aeration required for the different types of growing mediums associated with the above facilities especially as these questions use the Course Managers/Head Greenkeepers local knowledge of ground conditions and their collective experiences.

Surprisingly, there appeared to be no direct correlation between the frequency of aeration operations and the specific soil type. It could be argued therefore, that greenkeepers are either unsure of their aeration frequencies relating to soil type, or that there is a lack of an accepted industry standard.

In Question 3 the vast majority surveyed (62%) felt that their greens should be aerated every two or four weeks. It is also interesting to note that 22% felt their greens should receive some sort of aeration on a weekly basis. Only 6% felt that the period between aeration operations should be greater than four-week intervals. Of these it is worth pointing out that one individual suggested that their greens only needed aerating two to three times per year, while another suggested that his golf greens should receive 60 aeration operations in any twelve month period.

In Question 4 we observed a noticeable swing between that of the ideal aeration frequencies and those that are actually being achieved. The immediate comparison is between greenkeepers who would like to aerate every week (22%) and those who actually aerate every week (4%). The majority of those surveyed (58%) felt that they should aerate at least every two weeks, of which only 22% achieved this.

What is also clear is that 94% felt that they should aerate their greens between one and four times a month. Of that percentage only 22% reached their objectives.

By far the largest difference came in the category of 'Other' from 6% to a staggering 30%. Of those, the worst case recorded was one person who had not aerated within the last three seasons!

Question 5 revealed that over 50% of those surveyed failed to meet their aeration objectives due to golfer pressure. When 'management pressure' and 'lack of resources' are added to this, the figure becomes an overwhelming 76%. Of the remaining 24% the majority (implied) that their failure to meet objectives was due to a combination of the aforementioned factors. However, several did state that they received no pressure from either golfers or from their management team.

PHOTOCAST TEE SIGNS

By
EAGLE PROMOTIONS

Scorecards • Course Measurement • Yardage Books • Tee Signs
Event Boards • Leaderboards • Notice Boards • Bag Tags • Green Fee Tickets
Call Philip McInley on : 01883 344244
email us: eaglepromotions@compuserve.com

visit our website @ www.eaglepromotions.co.uk



The main observation from Question 6 is that the majority of aeration undertaken is of the least disruptive type (slit tinning). When linked to the issue of 'golfer pressure' discussed in Question 5, a worrying pattern begins to emerge.

Despite the fact that 88% of those surveyed in Question 7 are communicating with their club members, it appears that these communications are clearly not helping greenkeepers achieve their aeration objectives. This raises many questions, particularly those of communication methods, the timing of communications, the authority of those communications and how they are supported.

Although the initial results in Question 8 seem promising, it is worth bearing in mind that the majority of those who answered yes, were in fact talking about receiving support from either BIGGA, their agronomists, machinery manufacturers or STRI.

The 30% who answered in a negative way suggested a number of areas where improvements could be made. These included: -

- Better education of the golfer
- Better education of golf club secretaries
- Better greenkeeper education
- More help from the R&A and Home Unions
- Improved liaison with the golf professional organisations
- More exposure in golfing journals

There can be little doubt regarding the information gained in Question 9. Clearly there is an opportunity to build on this survey and perhaps in future, questions should be more direct and challenging.

Conclusion

From the survey we can see that the main issue to be addressed is 'why are we underachieving on our aeration objectives?'

According to those surveyed, aeration is an essential operation necessary if quality sports turf is to be provided. However, it would appear that the frequency of aeration operations and the type of aeration

required for each soil category is a mystery to those even with intimate knowledge of their specific environments. Obviously this does not provide a good foundation for greenkeepers to argue a positive case regarding aeration timing and scheduling. This comes as quite a shock, particularly as greenkeeper training and education has clearly moved in the right direction over the last few years. Perhaps another more nebulous issue now dominates this subject. Could it be that job security and continuity are now so important to greenkeepers that they do not actively follow what they know to be correct or what they know their employers will resent?

Possibly, the blame for underachieving should be targeted at those who are responsible for developing industry standards. After all, if the majority of greenkeepers were intrinsically motivated, it would follow that they would try hard to implement correct procedures. If clear research exists to confirm type and frequency of aeration relating to soil type and season, greenkeepers seem unaware of its validity. Further research and development may therefore be needed so that everyone associated with the industry has a higher understanding of this topic.

The most concerning issue drawn from the survey appears to be the pressure administered by the golfer. It is painfully obvious that aeration affects the putting surface, but the survey indicates that the balance between getting oxygen into the soil and producing an even putting surface has been entirely lost to the golfer. Shortermism has taken centre stage. Tactical and strategic objectives for green aeration are the casualties of this naive situation. A concerted effort must be made if things are to change. With golfers paying more for their round, pressure to produce ideal conditions undoubtedly increases. If we are to right this situation, the question of industry leadership once again comes to the fore. Without it, it would seem that circumstances could only deteriorate.

A plea to others

It would be of great benefit to know if the information revealed by the survey in the BB&O Section is reflected elsewhere in the country. Please take time to answer the eight questions and mail, email or fax your answers to Scott MacCallum at BIGGA HOUSE or simply pass on anecdotal evidence you've experienced personally to the magazine. The more widespread the problems identified in the survey are seen to be the greater the attention which can be given to them.