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—Save—

“Mondays — Golf Course Maintenance Day”

by Julius Albaugh, Westmoreland C.C.

The policy at many private clubs for a number of years has been to close the golf courses on Mondays to allow for maintenance of the golf courses. A few years ago this policy started to show signs of erosion when several private clubs opted to use a few Mondays a year for private outside parties. These parties have been a lucrative source of income for private clubs and golf course maintenance has been able to survive because the parties have been kept in moderation. A good policy to follow when scheduling special Monday events is to never book them on consecutive Mondays or on Mondays prior to Holidays or key mid-week golfing events.

In recent years many private clubs have experienced a more active golfing membership. This increased golfing activity has resulted in delays in tee-off times and crowded golf course conditions. To relieve the crowded conditions some are suggesting that the golf courses be opened on Mondays for the memberships. This could have a serious effect on golf course maintenance and playing conditions that private club members have grown used to. Today also, we have the greatest demand in history for excellence in the playing conditions of the golf course. As play increases golf course maintenance is forced to play more emphasis on cultural practices in order to meet the demand. The need for one day a week set aside for golf course maintenance is greater than ever before.

Few of the golfing membership of a club realize the scope of golf course maintenance and how it effects the game of golf. For years Mondays have been Golf Course Maintenance Day and the cultural practice activities have taken place behind the scenes. Many have formed the opinion that golf course maintenance involves no more than mowing grass, raking a sand trap or changing the cup location on the green.

Cultural practices are timely tasks and most often require that an area be taken out of play for a time during the process. Aerification, vertical mowing and topdressing are the cultural practices which must be performed in order to meet the increased demand for excellence in playability. Cultural practices require ideal weather conditions, a beautiful sunny, drying day is the best — the same as a great day for golfing. A cloudy, damp day forces the postponement of cultural practice activities. Cultural practices are not one step operations.

Aerification, the term used for the cultivation of turfgrass areas requires a number of steps. First there is the coring, the removal of soil and turfgrass cores from the soil to the surface. Next, the cores must be allowed a time to dry. This is followed by the dispersion of the cores, the soil portion is broken up and worked into the turf as topdressing and the turfgrass portion is left of the surface. Dispersion is accomplished by multiple mowing, vertical mowing or dragging. Next is the clean up operation which is done by blowing, sweeping and picking up the debris. The final step is irrigation to revive the turfgrass plants from the mechanical abuse incurred during the process. Aerification is generally performed during the spring and/or fall and may be needed on tees, greens, fairways and traffic areas. The amount of play, amount of play under wet conditions and type of soil all effect the amount of compaction and

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dictate the frequency of aerification. The scope of the area to be aerified is limited to what can be cleaned up in a 10 to 12 hour working day. If greens, tees and fairways are to be aerified, the process can take up to four Mondays.

Vertical mowing is a cultural practice performed to reduce the amount of thatch, remove grain from greens and to improve the playability of golfing turf. The practice of vertical mowing is coming more and more into the picture. A current trend is to use light-weight mowing equipment on fairways. While this practice is very beneficial in reducing soil compaction caused by mowing equipment and improving the appearance and playability, it can impose a problem — thatch development. Under certain growth conditions the lightweight cutting units are not heavy enough to maintain the desired cutting height and thus can produce a thatchy condition. To correct this, vertical mowing may be necessary. Vertical mowing pulls much debris from the turf and the process is just as time consuming as aerification. At present, vertical mowing of fairways is not a yearly task, but in the near future it is likely to become a yearly chore. Vertical mowing of greens is commonly practiced on two to four week intervals. Greens are often vertically mowed lightly in two directions and this is followed by a conventional mowing as a clean up operation. The time required to vertically mow 20 greens with modern equipment is around six hours.

Many golf courses have gone on a sand topdressing program on greens. Several have expanded the practice to tees. Once the sand topdressing program is started, one is committed to it for life. To stop the program would produce a sand layer in the greens which in a few years would stop air and water movement in the soil. This would produce a condition in which it would be very difficult to grow turf. The sand topdressing program requires a light topdressing every three weeks during the growing season. The time required to topdress 18 to 20 greens can take up to ten hours. There is the applying of the sand, a time for the sand to dry, the brushing of the sand into the turf and final clean up of the area. (continued page 8)

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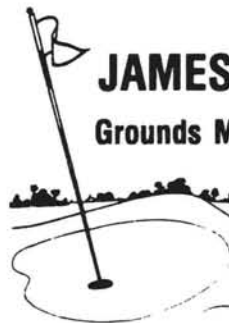
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The performance of cultural practices are not the only task for which a golf course maintenance day is needed. Many fertilizer and pesticide applications require “watering in” after the material has been applied. To omit the “watering in”, in the case of fertilizer applications could result in a fertilizer burn to the turfgrass. Certain pesticides, especially those used for grub control lose their effectiveness in a few hours if not watered in immediately. For these reasons it is best to make the applications while the golf course is closed and water can be applied promptly.

A golf course maintenance day is also used to replenish soil moisture lost during an extended dry period. A common practice is to irrigate just enough each night to allow the turf to survive through the next day. By doing this we assure dry playable conditions for the early morning golfers. After about a week of this practice we lose our desired soil moisture level and additional irrigation is needed. The added irrigation does produce wet areas and poor golfing conditions the next morning. By watering more on Sunday nights, and Mondays, time is allowed for the water to soak in before Tuesday mornings play.

Golf course maintenance while there are golfers on the golf course is not the most efficient operation. Out of common courtesy to not interfere with the individuals playing golf, much time is wasted setting idle while the golfer plays his or her ball. Our productivity is limited. When maintenance time is lost to the weather or there is a mid-week tournament to prepare for, Monday is the only day available to catch up on maintenance operations.

On Mondays a golf course maintenance staff strives to perform most all maintenance which could interfere with the game of golf. Whether it be a noisy operation such as removal of a tree near a tee or green, or the preparation of a flower bed near a tee for the convenience of the golfers the jobs are handled on Monday. Cross-cut mowing of fairways are scheduled for Monday because of the added time involved and working around play would even make it longer. Part of our maintenance goal is to provide the most pleasant golfing conditions and sometimes to do this there are jobs to do best when no one is around.

While many clubs do allow club employees, caddies and a few outside guests to play on Mondays, there is not always the most ideal golfing conditions provided. These golfers play on “what you see is what you get” basis! If a green is being top-dressed, they putt through the sand or skip the hole. If a fairway is being aerified and grounds crew members are working on the hole, the hole is skipped. If a sprinkler is operating, they play around it. They are well aware that maintenance comes first. They play under a condition we would not want to subject a dues paying member to.

Few of the golfing membership of a club to realize the scope of golf course maintenance. Many golf course superintendents have answered the telephone on a Monday to the surprise of a club member, who will often state, “What are you doing at the club on your day off?” They felt that because the club was closed, all club employees had the day off. Golf course maintenance is much more complicated than operating a lawn mower. The behind the scenes preventative and corrective maintenance practices that take place on Mondays never enter their minds. Should “Mondays — Golf Course Maintenance Day” be lost, many are in for a big surprise, the behind the scenes work will be brought out into the open.