

Modified bunker sand rakes create hand-done look

By TERRY BUCHEN

It is very interesting how bunker sand maintenance practices have evolved with the advent of the riding bunker rake. Prior to this evolution, superintendents had their

bunkers hand-raked with wooden rakes of varying widths, with long wooden replaceable teeth. Because the bunker sand was not washed in the old days, the long wooden teeth would break up the caking effect caused by the fine particles of soil present and would stir up the sand to make playing conditions difficult, at best. Witness Oakmont CC in years past.

Along came the riding bunker rake in the 1960s, fitted with similar teeth of metal, or a cultivator-type bar followed by a finish rake that creates a nice appearance. These rakes have always worked well to break up the crust and fluff up the sand.

But beginning in the 1970s, a major evolution took place: Bunker sand quality was increasing tenfold as it was being washed, sometimes several times, to remove the fine particles — and golfers, especially, on the professional tours — were demanding that the playing conditions from bunker sand be much firmer.

During most tournaments on the amateur and professional circuits, bunker sand would



The "Sandpacker" attachments angle (left foreground) can be adjusted by the superintendent to custom-fit his bunker sand maintenance objective.

be raked by hand, using metal leaf rakes which do little to disturb the playing conditions while smoothing any irregularities. When a superintendent hosted a tournament which had large bunkers that were impractical to rake by hand because of time constraints, he would usually be allowed to use a riding bunker rake with leaf rakes attached in lieu of the OEM rake attachment.

This innovation spread to other superintendents who do not have national tournaments, and a new evolution began in

modifying riding bunker rakes to simulate hand-raking. This was also fun for superintendents, who love to modify equipment to our personal maintenance objectives.

The next progression was testing of bunker sand at soil labs to see if its particles were angular or round. Angular particles were the most desired because they settle and pack better. Tournament specifications require that bunker sand be installed at least 90 days prior to an event and that wetting agents and irrigation be used to help settle the sand properly. Most superintendents in the transition zone and cool-season regions add bunker sand in the fall or winter to allow it to settle and pack faster.

Manufacturers of riding bunker rakes have made adjustments, over the last few years, to the rake attachment by shortening the teeth and cultivator bar. They even have a different version of the leaf rake as an option.

The best new modification I have seen is the "Sandpacker" attachment that replaces the OEM cultivator bar. Its angle is adjustable for the type of sand firmness desired.

Another modification that has proved worthwhile, to be installed in conjunction with the "Sandpacker," is to add two additional

horizontal weights that fit easily over the two existing weights, simply by adding a longer size bolt. The added weight puts more "down" pressure on the rake, which firms up the sand even more and gives the bunker a hand-raked appearance.

During last year's U.S. Open telecast, it was interesting to note that when the course was set up for the championship, they intentionally fluffed up the sand to make the bunkers play like the hazard they are supposed to be. It will be interesting if this trend continues on courses other than those hosting amateur and professional tournaments and championships.

Superintendents mainly unaffected by PVP law

Golf course superintendents normally deal with certified name varieties of turfgrass, and therefore reportedly will not be affected like homeowners by Plant Variety Protection Act (see story, page 1).

"If you continue to deal with reputable dealers who know the source of seed and how it's grown, it will be business as usual," said Tom Salt, plant variety protection examiner with the Department of Agriculture's PVP Office. "I've always found golf course superintendents to be

very knowledgeable about the seed industry, and who they deal with."

Ten states do not allow Variety Not Stated labels, according to Leslie Cahill, vice president of governmental affairs for the American Seed Trade Association. They are Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Rhode Island and South Carolina. Meanwhile, Virginia officials have discussed a registration list for VNS.

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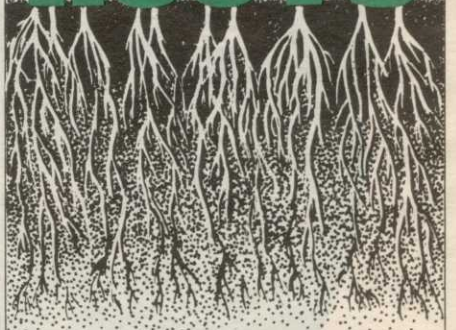


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