

On The Green

Pa. tandem at core of aeration clean-up

By MARK LESLIE

HAWLEY, Pa. — Nightmare at Woodloch Springs, Act III. That is what Mark Eisele and Mike DeSanti were trying to avoid when — after two years of horrors in aerating the new resort country club here — they made an innovation that could save thousands of superintendents major cleanup headaches.

Chief mechanic DeSanti, head superintendent Eisele and crew foreman Joe McConnell modified an R&R Brush Reel unit this fall and successfully used it to harvest plugs after aerating their 20-1/2 acres of fairways. The brush reel is manufactured to fit a Toro GM3 triplex mower and meant to clean up top-dressed greens. But the Woodloch Springs Country

Club trio took R&R's "ingenious" idea and turned it to an even greater good.

"After playing with the height and bedknife spacing, we've been able to neatly clean the fairways. On the scale of one to 10, it's a solid eight," DeSanti said. "It has ended a nightmare that always haunted us for months and months. Every week was one week closer to aerifying season and dealing with plug removal and untold hardships."

What we shall call the Woodloch Springs Modification was such a godsend, the men wanted to share it with colleagues. "Everyone who wants to remove plugs deals with this," DeSanti said.

"I imagine any courses in the Northeast — unless they have topsoil on their fairways — are dealing with the kind of fairways we have — hard pan and rocks," Eisele said. "No matter what technique they use for pulling plugs, and no matter what kind of soil they have, this method will work."

A key problem for Woodloch Springs, Eisele said, "was how to remove the plugs — the rocks, dirt and clay — so that we could mow without destroying real expensive, very hard-to-maintain, precision mowers. You're talking, literally, tons of plugs. The mower blades still get beat up [with the new method], but not as bad as before. Plus, before, we'd blow the plugs out into the rough where they'd stay until they deteriorated.



Mark Eisele, left, and Mike DeSanti are thrilled with the core clean-up of their new technique.

"Sharpening reels becomes another problem. It is an expensive process, and involves a lot of downtime."

Bentgrass, Eisele added, is "prone to diseases when it's tortured and that is a torturous process, especially when cutting with a dull blade. It's getting wounded rather than a nice clean cut."

And just two weeks after aerifying the fairways, "you can hardly tell. It's phenomenally faster," Eisele said.

Saying they tried sweepers and vacuums to no avail the first two years after opening the course in 1992, Eisele and DeSanti said the new method has many positives, among them turfgrass recovery and playability.

"When you have bone-dry conditions and bone-dry plugs, it is immaculate," DeSanti said. "We found a big difference in playability."

Warning that wet conditions drastically hamper this method, DeSanti said, "When the sun is out and drying the plugs, we can aerify in the morning, scoop the plugs at noon, and at sunset it's hard to tell there was a huge mess out on that fairway."

After the first pass with the GM3, the fairway is brushed with a golf cart-pulled, 10-foot-wide broom, and the GM3 makes a second pass, preparing the fairway for mowing.

Eisele said his crew can aerify as many as three holes a day and it is faster than the normal process — with a blower — even though they make two passes with the brushes.

MCCONNELL REFINEMENTS

Once the R&R reels arrived, the duty fell to McConnell to refine the plug-removal process. For bentgrass fairways cut at one-half inch:

- Adjust the bedknife so that it just skims the brush.
- Adjust the rear roller for maximum height.
- Set the cutting height to .400 inch by adjusting the front roller.
- Drop the bedknife away from the brush until the height is .300 inch by adjusting the bedknife bolts.
- Install the unit on the machine.

"To this day, those were the last adjustments made and are now the parameters for the process," DeSanti said.

This adjustment gives the bedknife a scooping angle, so that, with the reel spinning at high speed above it, the plugs are flipped into the bucket. "Then you just empty the bucket," Eisele said.

"The unique thing about the GM3 is that there are three rollers on each cutting unit," DeSanti said. "The two on the unit itself adjust the height of cut for the mower. The sole purpose of the large third roller, on the front, is to carry

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Tour of Duty

DAVID BERGSTROM
PGA West/Nicklaus
Resort Course
La Quinta, Calif.
Diners Club Matches
Dec. 8-11, ESPN/ABC

David Bergstrom has been a fixture at PGA West for the past seven years. The 29-year-old did an internship on the Stadium Course in 1987 while working on his two-year turf degree at Michigan State University. With diploma in hand, he returned in the spring of 1988 as a maintenance foreman on the same layout.

Over the next few years, he advanced to assistant superintendent and then head superintendent of the Palmer Course, superintendent of the Private Nicklaus Course, and as of April to head superintendent of both the Nicklaus Resort and Stadium layouts. "I've worked at all four PGA West courses now," Bergstrom said. "Each one is unique. It doesn't seem like I've been in the same place for seven years."

THINGS TO LOOK FOR:

The Nicklaus Resort layout has the golfer-turned-architect's characteristic plateaued fairways, according to Bergstrom.

The tournament pits two-person teams from the LPGA, PGA and Senior PGA Tours against each other. "It will be interesting to see how the tees are set up for the players on each of the tours," Bergstrom said.

MADE-FOR-TV PREPARATIONS: "There's really not much we've had to do except move a couple of trees that would have been in the way of the television cameras," the head superintendent said. The course has hosted other televised events, so things like the best tower and trailer locations have already been determined.

The course closed from Oct. 12-28 for routine maintenance. "Well scalp everything right down and then overseed it," Bergstrom said.

Core clean-up

Continued from previous page the bucket. So you can have a tremendous amount of weight in the bucket and it won't affect the flotation of the unit. There is no scalping."

They recommended that the operator wear a mask because of heavy dust, and added that the machine needs a new air filter daily as well as frequent oil changes.

...

Eisele feels the process will allow him to improve his subsoil.

"Eventually, we want to start top dressing the fairways to get a better layer of topsoil."

STEVE SORRELL
Colleton River Plantation
Hilton Head Island, S.C.
Wendy's Three Tour
Challenge
Dec. 24-25, ESPN/ABC

Steve Sorrell, 34, was a struggling golfer on the Florida mini-tour when he chanced to meet Tom Alex, head superintendent at Grand Cypress Resort in Orlando. "I'd considered becoming a superintendent," Sorrell said. "But I got serious about it after seeing what Tom was doing. He was an

inspiration." Sorrell put away his clubs and worked on the Grand Cypress grounds crew for a year. He enrolled at Penn State, received a two-year turf management degree and returned to Orlando, where he eventually became Alex's assistant. Nearby MetroWest Country Club handed him the head superintendent's reins in 1989. A year and a half ago, Colleton River made him head superintendent of the coastal South Carolina course.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR:

The one-day tournament was filmed in early October and will be replayed on television over

Christmas. The Bermudagrass fairways were overseeded with rye and the greens with poa trivialis three weeks before the event. "They should stripe better," Sorrell said. "But it's a challenge to get it ready in time for the tournament. If we can maintain 60 to 70 percent of the overseeded grass, we'll be doing well." Colleton River is considered one of Jack Nicklaus' most playable layouts, with small but fairly flat greens nestled between flowing sand dunes. "It's one of the prettiest courses I've ever seen," Sorrell said.

MADE-FOR-TV PRE-

PARATIONS: The one-day, 18-hole tournament features three-player teams from the PGA, Senior PGA and LPGA tours in a sort of battle of the sexes and generations. The players change clothes after nine holes so that when the event is televised on Dec. 24 and 25, it looks like they took a day off in between. Sorrell spreads a little extra fertilizer a few weeks before the event to green things up for the cameras. Crews removed 150 trees this summer and have been busily cleaning up unsold house lots surrounding the course to help residential sales.

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