

# On The Green

## TPC River Highland's Hunker borrows from tennis industry for firm bunkers

By TERRY BUCHEN

**C**ROMWELL, Conn. — Supplanted by golf as the fastest-growing sport of our time, the game of tennis nevertheless came to golf's rescue here at the Tournament Players Club (TPC) at River Highlands. The focal point of the incident — a product called Adcourt — could prove an ally to golf course superintendents everywhere needing to firm up their sand bunkers quickly.

A bit of background: TPC at River Highlands is the annual site for the Canon Greater Hartford Open on the PGA Tour. Completely rebuilt in 1990 under direction of course architect Bobby Weed, with help of player consultants Howard Twitty and Roger Maltbie, the course's condition and design have been well received as it continues to mature into a fine test of golf.

But the 1993 tournament was held in hot and windy conditions, and the bunker sand performed below expectations. The top two inches of sand dried out quickly, producing "fried egg" lies and soft, fluffy conditions.

Following the event, sand samples were sent to a soil lab to discover why the bunkers would not firm up properly. Tests showed the penetrometer value of the sand was very low — 2.3 kg/cm<sup>2</sup>. This indicated a moderate to high tendency for the sand to "bury the ball" because most of the sand particles were "sub-rounded" and would never pack well nor firm up under dry conditions.

It became obvious that all the bunker sand would have to be replaced. But the 1994 tournament was rapidly approaching last June, and there wasn't enough time to do it before the event.

Superintendent Ted Hunker's focus shifted to looking for a short-term



One of Ted Hunker's crew members spreads Adcourt top dressing to the bunker edges while a colleague in the background uses a rotary spreader.

solution to firm up the existing bunker sand. PGA Tour senior agronomist Allan MacCurrach recommended a few ideas and they decided to top dress the sand with tennis court top dressing material.

By experimenting, Hunker observed the best results were when Adcourt was lightly mixed into the top two inches of bunker sand. A Har-Tru top dressing, Adcourt is dry and powdery material consisting of crushed greenstone and gypsum.

To quantify that the Adcourt top dressing was, in fact, firming up the bunker sand, samples were sent in to the soil lab, whose analysis was similar to what was observed out of the

bunkers. The penetrometer value had increased significantly, to 2.8 kg/cm<sup>2</sup>, and the laboratory also confirmed that

the Adcourt, when blasted onto the grass surface from a bunker shot, would not be detrimental.

But, Hunker and others speculated that the benefits from the tennis court material would be short-lived because it would be leached out and become diluted through the maintenance raking process.

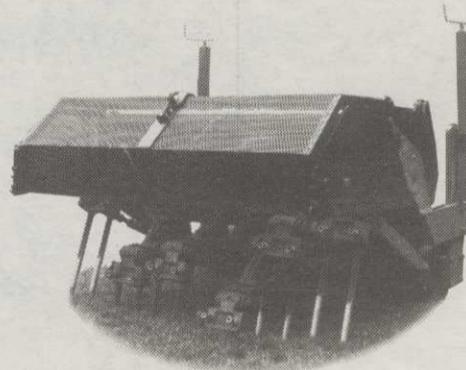
In just three days six employees treated all 120 bunkers two weeks prior to the tournament.

Fifteen tons of tennis court top dressing was used at a cost of \$2,300.

The procedure was to lightly loosen the sand and apply Adcourt at 160 pounds per 1,000 square feet with a push-type rotary spreader. On the edges and steep banks, it was applied by hand and then it was all raked into the surface using with long-toothed landscape rakes.

The sand was thoroughly wetted down prior to firming the surface by wheel-rolling with bunker rakes. During the tournament, the bunkers were hand-raked with leaf rakes, as per tournament specifications.

The prize: The 1994 tournament was a huge success and the playability of the bunkers was excellent.



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