



CHARTER

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## TO SAND OR NOT TO SAND — IS THAT THE QUESTION?

By Virgil Robinson

Sand topdressing of putting green surfaces has gotten more and more attention in the Washington metropolitan area and across the nation over the past few years. For those who might be contemplating this course of putting green maintenance, I would like to explain the circumstances that led Burning Tree Club to straight sand topdressing and to share with you a few techniques that have been used and some personal observations that have been made.

On coming to Burning Tree as superintendent in early 1977, I was aware of a history of difficult to manage greens. Over the 55 years of the club's existence many topdressing materials had been used, various aerification practices and frequencies had been performed and from time to time greens had been rebuilt using the best materials and knowledge available at that particular time.

After a horrendous "summer of 77" as I have come to call the ordeal experienced that year, I decided some questions had to be answered and drastic action taken. Pride and self-preservation are very strong motivating factors.

In probing and observing the greens throughout that first summer several observations were made:

1. There were many different layers identifiable with different topdressing materials used over the years. This was not surprising and not unlike conditions found on other golf courses of this vintage.
2. Reddish and greenish looking materials were found in some layers and in old aerifier holes and by rubbing between the thumb and forefinger had characteristics which closely resembled the "slick" feeling of silt and clay. These materials, I am personally convinced, were calcined clay chips which were used as topdressing in prior years and which eventually broke down into individual clay particles.

3. Puddles of water disappeared more quickly from our asphalt parking lot than from our greens. The soil analysis taken later and the previously mentioned clay layers would help explain this situation.

4. A 1/16" sand layer existed about 5/8" below the green's surface. If the root system reached this layer, none penetrated it. In some previous year a one time shot of sand had been applied as a topdressing.

5. Bandane 15G had been used in several previous years for preemergent crabgrass control. Knowing the phytotoxicity of this pesticide on putting green turf and also its half-life, I felt this was contributing substantially to our turf problem and would continue for several years.

Before recommending to the Board of Governors a program of major green's renovation and maintenance practices, I decided to get a particle size analysis and physical measurements of a soil sample from several of the greens. This test was performed through the USGA Soil Testing Laboratory at Texas A&M University.

This testing procedure confirmed in the laboratory what I was seeing and experiencing in the field. Although the sand fraction of the sample was satisfactory, silt and clay made up 26% of the sample and gravel was in the 7% range. These values should have been no more than 8% and 3% respec-

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## President's Message

Our May Superintendent/Pro meeting gives us the opportunity to spend the day with our area golf professionals; an opportunity to reunite with old acquaintances and to gain new ones.

Much has been said about the Golf Professional and Superintendent's working relationship. We can both do our jobs without the aid of each other, but it sure is much easier when we work together. Show me a club that the golf pro and superintendent cooperate and coordinate their schedules with each other and it will show us a successful operation and a happy membership. They must be honest, objective and respect each other's professional ability and club position to be a successful team.

Plan to spend tuesday, May 13 with your golf professional in beautiful Harford County.

Looking forward to seeing you.



Ron