

## COPING WITH HEAVY TRAFFIC ON THE GOLF COURSE

Jon D. Maddern  
Golf and Parks Superintendent  
City of Farmington Hills, MI

I was asked to be a part of this panel concerning coping with heavy traffic on the golf course after discussing how good a season we had this past year. I guess it was felt that after having over 46,200 rounds played in 1986 and over 46,800 this past season on a 9-hole, 3,299 yard course with green sizes averaging 5,000 sq ft and able to keep grass green, MOST OF THE TIME, that I must have some secrets.

San Marino Golf Course was designed by our next speakers (Jerry Matthews) firm and was built in 1964. The layout is challenging but fun for all types and ages of golfers. The course was owned by a family who were in the construction business and was sold to the City of Farmington Hills in 1978. The course receives heavy league play each day in the mornings and in the later afternoons and is booked with general play the remainder of the day.

One key to coping with heavy traffic is trying to educate your golfer of what and why you are doing something, i.e., aerifying, topdressing. They can be a big help in passing the word. Another key is the course design; like everything else it may look good on paper but it might not be worth anything in the field. A good golf course architect is very important and one who has experience in your type of course is also important. Courses need to be updated in their design. Courses designed in the 60's were not planned for the boom in golf that occurred in the late 70's and is still going on. Greens were designed to handle smaller amounts of rounds and need to be enlarged or more maintenance as far as aerification is needed. This is what we have had to do. No more the traditional spring and fall aerification. We do it at least 3 times and some of our smaller greens are done 4 to 5 times a season. Ladies tees were designed and built real small with little priority and now they are a major part of the golf played and they are asking for the same standards as men. Carts. We all know the amount of play using carts had increased and compaction from them is a big problem. Cart paths were installed next to high traffic tee areas and we started a system that was observed by our Mayor and Pro in Florida of painting a white line 30 feet from the edge of the green around a green and putting up signs stating "No carts between white lines and greens." This worked quite well, however you have to paint the lines once a week. I am fortunate that I am not only in charge of the golf course but Grounds and Parks also and that we have a gas-powered paint liner compressor that we used on ballfields. We used this machine to paint these lines which was faster and cheaper than using the marking paint cans.

The biggest problem that you have to deal with in a heavy traffic golf course or any area is compaction. Aerification is a major necessity. I told you how often we do greens but we also have to do tees and fairways. Tees, like our greens and fairways we do twice in a season. We also started doing some badly compacted areas of the rough to help promote turf. Type of aerifier is not important. You have to review the reasons why you are aerifying and your budget and manpower resources and make your decision. We used a spoon tine tow type Ryan aerifier on our fairways and a Cushman

Greensaver on our greens, collars and tees. We lose something in depth compared to some aerifiers, however, this allows us to do the job with little manpower or having to take the green out of play.

The most important part of coping with high traffic is keeping the plant healthy. No healthy grass, no play, no job. Your fertilization levels must be kept up, especially potash to promote a strong root structure. I also have to keep the nitrogen levels up. I use about 4 1/2 to 5 lbs of N on my greens per 1,000 sq ft per season. This gives them the ability to recuperate from the traffic and look good and to have a good playing surface.

Having a good soils structure is also very important. If you don't you have a lot of work ahead of you. Try and get soils such as sand that does not compact very easily. Heavy clay soils are a big problem as far as compaction is concerned and aerification becomes even more important.

In closing there is no clear cut way of coping with heavy traffic on turf. You must evaluate what your conditions are and what is the best way to solve the problem. I hope I have given you some ideas that you can use and or expand upon. Thank you very much.