

# Clipping Disposal in the Dairy State

by JAMES M. LATHAM

Director, Great Lakes Region, USGA Green Section

**T**HE USE OF lightweight mowing units and the collection and removal of clippings on mixed-species turf in northern fairways has significantly enhanced the spread of creeping bentgrass. In addition, the fairways have a much better appearance, especially when mowing is done in the early morning. The overall result of this operation has been to encourage acceptance of the program throughout the *Poa annua* belt.

The operation is not without its problems, however. What to do with the clippings has been one of the major concerns. Composting and plow-down is possible at a few courses, while disposal by refuse haulers has become a common but expensive practice at others. It has become unpleasantly clear that this harvest of clippings cannot be piled up and forgotten, at least not in areas occupied by humans.

Golf course superintendents in the heart of Wisconsin have looked back to their farming legacy to solve the problem on their courses by using manure spreaders. They are not the types we might picture in our minds, but they are manure spreaders nevertheless. A side-throwing unit is now being used by superintendent Randy Smith at the Nakoma Golf Club in Madison, Wisconsin, and Tom Harrison at Maple Bluff Country Club has a similar machine. At Blackhawk Country Club, Monroe Miller uses a more conventional rear-discharge unit.

In the Nakoma operation, clippings are put in small windrows about 20 feet into the primary roughs along the length of the fairways. These small piles are picked up by a Rake-O-Vac and taken to the maintenance area. There, they are dumped for later transfer into the spreader by a front-end loader.

The spreader has an auger-type feed to a flair-type discharge device on one side, which throws the clippings 40 to 45 feet into the roughs. Clippings are not spread on the same area for two or three weeks afterward to prevent a heavy buildup of clippings in any single area.

Besides saving about \$150 per week for dumpster charges, the clippings



(Top) Clippings are broadcast into the roughs with manure spreaders which have an auger feed to a side or rear-discharge thrower.

(Above) Windrows of clippings are picked up by machine and taken to the maintenance yard for transfer into spreaders.

have some fertilizer value. The machine cost (about \$6,500) is also offset by its use as a soil shredder/mixer.

There have been no complaints by golfers in the two or three years of operation. It is important, though, to be sure no one is in the line of fire. Spreading should be done the same day as the clippings are collected, since they can clump quickly, making the clippings difficult to spread evenly. By the way, there has been no apparent increase of *Poa annua* in these roughs. On Randy's wish list is a ramp setup to facilitate

direct loading of the spreader from the sweeper.

## Sources of Spreaders

Knight Manufacturing Corporation  
Broadhead, Wisconsin 53510  
(608) 897-2131  
Knight Slinger #912, side discharge

Akey Manufacturing Company  
Footville, Wisconsin 53537  
(608) 876-6166  
Several models available,  
rear discharge