

## SANDING AND SWEEPING

by DAVID A. OATIS

Director, Northeastern Region, USGA Green Section



*A view of the brush attachment that replaces the cutting blade on the reel.*

**T**OPDRESSING IS ONE of the oldest known golf course maintenance practices. It has long been known to be extremely beneficial to putting green management. Its virtues are well documented in research and have been extolled in scores of articles through the years. But despite the fact that topdressing greens is an essential management program, simple logistics often make it difficult for superintendents to follow through with the practice as often as they wish. Golfers, as well as golf course mech-

anics, often gnash their teeth at the mere mention of topdressing.

Debris left on a green after topdressing has been dragged in can play havoc with a putt. (It is a well-known fact that golf balls can only be knocked off line by debris or aeration holes; they are never knocked on line.) The debris left behind can range from a few grains of sand to many small pebbles, depending on the quality of the material. This residue is very difficult to clean up, and failing to remove the debris prior to mowing can do tremendous damage to

delicate mowing equipment in very short order.

The remedy may be as simple as back-lapping the cutting units, but it might also be as extensive as the complete re-grinding of the reel and the replacement of the bedknife. In any event, the damage done is time consuming and frequently expensive to repair.

Many superintendents use clean-up units, which are simply old cutting heads kept just for this purpose, to mow the greens after topdressing. Using old cutting units definitely helps, but some

debris is generally left behind even after they have been used several times. Other superintendents have resorted to using hand brooms to manually sweep the debris off the greens, but this is a labor-intensive task, and it is precisely what prompted golf course superintendent Tom Streiff, at Weatherwax Golf Course, in Middletown, Ohio, to devise a better method. Whether you subscribe to the theories about frequent, light topdressing or not, I think the following idea may be of help.

Take an old reel and cut out the blades with a cutting torch, leaving the spiders intact. Then weld four of the small grooming brush holders parallel to the reel shaft. Several manufacturers make these brush assemblies, and they all seem to work well. After they are welded in place, simply slide the brushes into the holders and the mowing unit will have been converted into a sweeping unit.

The unit is best operated with an old bedknife, and it should be adjusted so that the brushes strike the bedknife lightly. Brand-new brushes tend to hit the mower shields, so slightly used ones will actually do a better job.

The height of the bedknife on the new sweeping unit should be set just as you would set the height of a mower. Setting the unit at a normal greens cutting height or higher will facilitate the removal of the larger particles of sand and debris while leaving the bulk of the topdressing behind. By setting the sweeping unit lower, more material can be removed. This might be necessary after an excessive amount of material is applied. We all know how difficult it is to gauge the proper amount of topdressing to put down after aerifying, and a device such as this will allow a larger margin for error.

Without doubt, these sweeping units can help superintendents save on labor costs and improve topdressing efficiency, but more importantly, they may enable superintendents to topdress more frequently and more effectively and thus improve putting green quality for golf.



*Before (top) and after (above) shots showing the effectiveness of the sweeper.*