FAKE RIGHT, THROW LEFT!

A simple change can make a big difference.

by LARRY GILHULY

THE SIMILARITIES between a golf course superintendent and a football quarterback are striking. Both are leaders of teams that rely totally on teamwork for success. Both ply their trades on grass fields. Both provide enjoyment and frustration for millions in their respective sports. Above all, both are always learning and inventive when presented with a particular problem.

The Coeur d'Alene Resort Golf Course is located in a scenic portion of northern Idaho. In addition to being the site of the famous floating green, this location provides a wonderful growing environment for creeping bentgrass. Indeed, creeping bentgrass grows so well that an accumulation of three to four inches of thatch had occurred on the fairways during the first four years following construction. Aeration and thatch control were minimal during the early years; however, it became obvious that the excessive thatch needed to be treated in an aggressive manner. Enter John Anderson, golf course superintendent and the new quarterback for the golf maintenance operation.

Superintendent Anderson's program for thatch control started in late 1995 with a three-pronged attack. First, the fertilizer and irrigation practices were changed to slow the accumulation of thatch. Second, a decision was made to treat the fairways similarly to the greens, with ongoing applications of sand. The equipment inventory was upgraded with newer spin spreaders to allow the rapid application of sand at light rates on a frequent basis, thereby avoiding interference with the playing guests. This part of the program has had a significant, positive impact on establishing fairway firmness and assisting in thatch degradation.

The third portion of the thatch control program was an intensive aeration schedule, with complete core removal. But, after taking approximately 18 hours to clean the par-5 first fairway (3.5 acres) in the fall of 1995, it was obvious that a faster solution was necessary. What was the next play in the game plan? A long bomb to his mechanic, Ray Link, who scored the winning touchdown!

Mr. Link used his mechanical mind to come up with a simple and inexpensive method to address the concerns dealing with core removal from fairways. These problems included:

- Excessive time to complete core removal with one machine (100 yards at a time!).
- Wasted time transporting cores for dumping.
- Excessive equipment wear during core transportation.
- Excessive cost for additional equipment needed to speed the operation.
- Extended course disruption.

While all of these challenges seemed insurmountable, they were easily overcome by producing one small change to the delivery system of the Cushman CoreHarvestor. The second, shorter conveyer belt that delivers the cores into the bed of the utility vehicle was removed and replaced with a belt twice as long that swivels to throw cores in the opposite direction! With this change, the following occurred during 1996:

- Core removal was four times faster when throwing cores into three utility vehicles.
- Time was not wasted in transporting cores with the machine used for cleanup.
- Wear on the equipment was decreased.
- Additional equipment purchase was not necessary.
- Course disruption was minimal.

Through the use of an outside machine shop, the frame used for the conveyer belt was remanufactured to fit the larger 6-foot belt. The changeover from regular operation to the reverse direction requires only five minutes and can be completed easily by one worker. The total cost for this change was approximately $1,000 when completed by outside sources. The cost can be reduced to as little as $600 if done in-house. For more information about this idea, contact Ray Link at 208-765-2947.

Do you have a situation where this idea would prove helpful? If so, remember to fake right and throw left!

As director of the Green Section's Western Region, LARRY GILHULY *helps golf course superintendent-quarterbacks in 11 states come up with winning game plans.*

Throwing aeration cores in the opposite direction greatly increases the speed of the operation.