

Lost and Found

Restoring lost hole locations on *Poa annua* greens.

BY PAUL VERMEULEN



Restoring lost hole locations on *Poa annua* greens can be as easy as removing the existing sod and filling in the depressed area with aerification cores harvested during the fall.

For most of us, the hands of time are admittedly cruel. A wrinkle here, a few pounds there, and before we know it, the innocent child of our youth has been lost and replaced with someone who is the parent we swore we would never become. Worse yet is the fact that these changes occur so gradually that we are scarcely aware of them until we look at an old, forgotten photograph.

On the face of a green, the hands of time can be equally wicked. Over a period of a few months a putting surface can shrink an imperceptible fraction of an inch because a conscientious employee is worried about scalping the collar and avoids the edge of the green while mowing. Over a period of years, the fractions can add up to a few feet or even a yard or two, and all of a sudden the prized Sunday hole location in the back corner has disappeared.

To restore a lost hole location, superintendents across the country typically plant sod that is either grown on site or purchased from a commercial nursery. The advantage of so doing is that sodding yields instantaneous results that today's *I-want-it-now* golfers like to see.

The disadvantage for those maintaining *Poa annua* greens, however, is that sod grown in a nursery seldom has the same color and texture because it is established with creeping bentgrass. As a consequence, the putting surface looks scarred for several years or, more specifically, until the *Poa annua* from the green invades the restored area.

Perfectionists that they are, Richard Bowden, Robert Lively, and Raymond Schmitz (all superintendents in the Chicago area) chose to try something just a little bit different. Instead of using sod, they chose to use aerification cores harvested from their courses during the fall season. In each case, the results speak for themselves in that one can hardly tell that several of their greens have been restored to their original shape.

To restore lost hole locations on their *Poa annua* greens, Bowden, Lively, and Schmitz used the following simple approach:

Determine the boundaries of the restoration area by identifying lost hole locations. Once the boundaries have been determined, mark them for later reference with paint or small indicator flags. Following the set boundaries, use

a sod cutter to remove the existing turf. If the boundary extends into the rough, then cut the rough sod separately from the collar and dispose of it.

Relocate the existing collar to conform to the new boundary of the restoration area. As the length of the new collar area will be greater than that of the existing collar, it will be necessary to reduce the width of the new collar to avoid exhausting the available sod supply. After the existing collar has been relocated, remove an additional 2 inches of soil from the exposed restoration area. To remove an even 2-inch layer of soil, loosen the ground using a sod cutter.

Prepare the planting bed for the aerification cores by cultivating the soil with an aerifier or heavy-duty, walk-behind vertical mower. If appropriate, incorporate a starter fertilizer while cultivating the soil.

Harvest a supply of $\frac{3}{8}$ " aerification cores from the putting surface being restored. If additional cores are needed, harvest cores from a neighboring green with similar characteristics. Using the cores, fill in the restoration area. Level the surface of the cores by adding top-dressing material. If desired, sprinkle a few handfuls of creeping bentgrass seed over the surface of the cores. Finally, roll the cores with a heavy roller to true the putting surface.

The grow-in of the new turf simply requires equal parts of patience and common sense. In the Chicago area, the putting surface grows in after approximately eight to ten weeks when the cores are planted in mid-September. By the following June, the mowing height of the restored area can be reduced and the new location readied for play by Father's Day weekend. This approach may take a little longer than sodding, but as they say, the proof is in the pudding.

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