

Two for the Money

Combining fairway mowing and clipping dispersal in one job saves time and labor, and lessens interference with golfers.

BY CHRIS HARTWIGER

Labor is the largest expense in golf course maintenance budgets, and in an era of slow growth in the game, every golf course is either reducing staff or looking for ways to increase productivity. Jason Sanderson and his staff at Cherokee Country Club in Knoxville, Tennessee, are on a mission to maximize worker productivity without compromising on quality. Another key tenet of their

maintenance program is to get as much work done on the golf course as possible before play each day. This turf tip will explore the unique idea of mowing fairways and dispersing clippings at the same time.

ORIGIN OF THE IDEA

Fairway mowing and clipping dispersal are two important jobs during the growing season, and the concept of

mowing and dispersing clippings at the same time is not new. Over the years, superintendents have equipped fairway mowers with nets, hoses, or ropes to break up clippings while mowing. Although these concepts are effective to a point, the staff at Cherokee Country Club felt they could improve on this idea and further enhance worker productivity. The staff found that using a Buffalo Turbine blower



Combining mowing and clipping dispersal allows the staff to get one more job done before play. Best of all, both of these jobs are done with one operator.

was the most effective way to disperse clippings. Dragging nets or hoses did not produce the desired result.

Several years ago while Chris Sykes was the golf course superintendent and Jason Sanderson was the assistant superintendent, they hypothesized that it might be possible to connect the Buffalo Turbine Cyclone KB3 blower to the back of their John Deere 3235B fairway mower. The connection was easy to make, but they were left with several hurdles to overcome before this idea could be put into use with the quality they expected.

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

The first matter to address was the connection of the blower to the fairway mower. Fortunately, the talented mechanic at Cherokee fabricated a hitch similar to those found on many popular utility vehicles. The Buffalo Turbine blower can be quickly hitched to the fairway mower with a pin.

The next stop was a trial run on the fairways. The staff learned that pointing the nozzle directly behind the blower caused the fairway bermudagrass to tuft up and did not provide a wide enough swath of wind to disperse the clippings. However, when the nozzle of the blower was angled to the previous pass mowed, the grass did not tuft and the swath was wide enough to disperse the clippings. At this point, it looked like the idea was a success.

Unfortunately, the staff realized that the fairway mower's exhaust pipe discharged directly behind the Buffalo Turbine blower. This led to clogging of the blower's air filter after only six to eight mowings. With the help of the mechanic, the exhaust pipe was modified to discharge out the side. Today, Deere fairway mowers have a side discharge, so this is no longer an issue.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Mr. Sanderson felt confident enough in the results of this experiment to



The blower and fairway mower unit are attached via a simple hitch.



The mower operator has easy access to the blower controls.

make this a part of the regular maintenance program, and he reports that operator training is straightforward. At Cherokee Country Club, the fairways employ a split or 50:50 mowing pattern. The mower operator has easy access to the controls of the Buffalo blower. The operator begins with two mower passes up and down the middle of the fairway. On successive mowing passes, the blower nozzle is pointed to the previous pass in that direction and the clippings are dispersed.

The final two mower passes require another pass using the blower only. Mr. Sanderson reports that the learning curve of his operators has been quick and the process is not much different from mowing fairways only. Mr. Sanderson mentioned that with the mower and blower configuration, the operator cannot make as sharp a turn as with the fairway mower only. This is beneficial, actually, as it protects the turf against injury caused by sharp turns.

If the growth rate of the grass is unusually fast or if the mowing schedule has been interrupted by bad weather, Mr. Sanderson advises the operator to watch and make sure all the clippings are dispersed. If any remain, the

operator makes additional passes to clean off the fairways.

AND THE WINNERS ARE?

Both the maintenance staff and the golfers are big winners with this program. The maintenance staff benefits through reductions in fuel, labor, equipment, and improvements in productivity. An added benefit is that a separate utility vehicle is not needed to tow the blower.

The golfer is the real winner with this idea, too. The blower is one of the loudest pieces of equipment on the golf course. When the staff gets the fairways mowed and clippings dispersed, golfers enjoy well-groomed surfaces and less disruption from noisy, but necessary, golf course jobs.

Labor issues and productivity will continue to play an important role in golf course maintenance for many years to come. Implementing this turf tip just might be the bargain you have been searching for.

CHRIS HARTWIGER, senior agronomist in the Southeast Region, is fond of multitasking from his home base in Birmingham, Alabama.