

CHALKBOARD

TIPS FROM THE PROS

A MORE TARGETED APPROACH TO AERATING

By Nigel Rennie, Multitynes, Ltd., Markham

The benefits of aerating a sports field are generally well understood by turf managers. The process involves puncturing the hard upper crust and permitting air and oxygen to reach the root zone. Air and water once again become available in the growing medium. Plants that can breathe and drink water with their roots will thrive and thicken, especially if the aeration process is accompanied by a fertilizer application.

Unfortunately for most groundskeepers, aerating the playing field is a once-a-year operation. The process is too disruptive and cumbersome. It is time-consuming to break up the cores and remove the residues.

Much of this unpleasantness can be avoided by taking a new approach to aeration. It is not necessary to aerate the entire field every time you aerate. There are large

portions of the field that receive very little play, and as a result are not compacted and do not require aeration more than once a year. Instead, aeration should be concentrated on the heavier play area, such as center field and in front of goalposts on football fields.

Don't wait for the grass to die in these areas before bringing out the aerator. Every groundskeeper and turf manager knows the heavy wear areas on a field long before these areas show signs of thinning. I suggest, weeks before the playing season commences, outlining potential wear areas with spray paint to designate them for special treatment. I suggest using a small, self-propelled aerator for these areas, with half-inch tines and two-inch spacings. Aerate to a depth of two to three inches. Before matting in the cores, apply a seed mixture

at a heavy rate of 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet.

This process should be repeated every two or three weeks, well into the playing season. The soil in the heavy play areas will be well cultivated as a result of this treatment and a new crop of seed will constantly germinate to keep the stand of grass thick.

You may eventually lose the battle to keep the field playable at center field, but it may not be until the last game of the season. You can relax in the knowledge that you gave it your best shot. Then, if you're in an area that has one, let an old-fashioned winter, with plenty of freezing and thawing action, aerate the field while you relax in the Caribbean.

Editor's Note: This article was adapted from Sport Turf Newsletter, Volume 3, Issue 4, January, 1991.

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