learned so much, and I am indebted to him for being so generous with his time.

The days end came entirely too fast as we had to head up to Rotterdam to Europort for the boat back to the UK across the North Sea. Sleeping on a cargo ship was an experience all in itself! But we arrived safely back to the UK through Hull Port at 8am this morning, set for another full and fun day.

May 10

Thursday marked a visit to see Mr. Alan Ferguson, the Head Groundsman of the English FA, tasked with getting St. George's Park prepared for its opening this summer. The FA is in good hands, that is for sure. Not only are the pitches absolutely gorgeous, but Mr. Ferguson and his wonderful wife, Mrs. Carol Ferguson, have a vision for the park is grand and fantastic. I can not thank either of them enough for taking time to see us today to show us around and share some stories over tea. The conversation, the ideas, the attitude, the dedication; I hope to be able see the park again next year to see the dramatic change it will go through. The expanse of the park and the rolling hills reminded me a lot of home at SoccerPlex and so did all the rain!

Have a look at the park: http://www.thefa.com/St-Georges-Park

Thank you again to the Fergusons for having us and to Simon for leading the "escaped" through London, France, Belgium, Netherlands, and now back to Manchester in the northern UK.

We visit the champions tomorrow. [Who will it be] Man U or Man City!?

THATCH MANAGEMENT

THE PAST 10 DAYS have seen an up and down weather pattern in the Mid-Atlantic. A few cool, crisp days followed with hot, dry then hot, humid days. Dry conditions have prevailed until today, allowing some aggressive cultivation to take place in conjunction with the wrap up of soccer league season and in preparation for summer club lacrosse season.

On cool season pitches, aeration pass number 6 took place with deep tine aeration at 8" w/ an aggressive 15 degree kick, followed with pass number 7 w/ 3/4" coring tines on 2x2 spacing. With the combination, deep compaction relief took place along with air venting and thatch reduction in the top organic layer, both much needed following the heavy traffic of May and entering the summer stress period. All aeration techniques will continue, just not as aggressively though into the heat.

Bermudagrass received an aggressive core aeration as well. With it picking up growth and starting into camp season next week, this is the last break during the week bermudagrass will see until the last week of August. Deep tine aeration will follow suit next week in the evenings following camps.

In reference to thatch reduction from core aeration, following the 1st sweeping of cores from the field we brushed the fields with a heavy brush to stand the grass plants back upright and fluff up any remaining cores. Around Europe, brushing was common so I wanted to add it to our program immediately. I assumed that the main benefit would be standing up the grass for better health and mowing. Well I was right on that part, but the biggest immediate difference was the remaining thatch on the very top of the field that was fluffed up. It was staggering! Piles of thatch were everywhere. Certainly we expect to bring up some, but had no idea that it would be the amount it was. Especially in a lighter growing period under growth regulation, following heavy traffic, and when we have mowed very little as we raise the height up a 1/4" to 1 1/4" If that amount comes up during light growth, I can only imagine the amount that will arise during aggressive growth.

As mentioned, brushing was a common practice around pitches in Europe, as it is in golf course management. But in sports field management, it's not something that takes place a lot. After the observations of our 1st experience it will become a weekly practice followed with mowing with baskets for collection. I immediately am looking into tine harrows for additional fluffing and am sharpening the verticut blades as well. We think our program is aggressive enough but yet again we are wrong!

Following "Cultivated Thoughts on Thatch Management" and the results of core verifying our cool season turfgrass fields the week before a stretch of 100 degrees F (38 degrees C), I have spent more time examining the merits of core aeration. Certainly we as professional managers know the importance of core aeration. But with time constraints and all the other aeration options available to use today, coring is a bit less used. After the past few weeks, I am convinced that it is time to buck that trend and get back to the basics of core aeration.

Why do we core aerate? No it's not just to create overtime for ourselves and our work crews! Removing the column of soil from the profile makes a direct, open avenue for gas exchange in the soil. Water is able to infiltrate the profile easier, as well as the removal of thatch/ organic material/ soil that could be undesirable. Certainly solid tines open columns similarly, but they do so at the expense of compacting the soil around the column. Do not misunderstand me ANY type of aeration/venting that can be done at ANY time is essential to turfgrass survival, especially in high traffic field situations. But pulling cores is the most beneficial of all for gas exchange, thatch removal, and water infiltration into the top of the profile (deep tine aeration is a separate subject for deep water infiltration).

Basic teaching advocates core aeration 2 times a year. I have spent most of my career buying into that thinking, especially because of the intensity of the process. By now I am realizing that the benefits from core aeration are sometimes lost in the mess that is created from the aeration process. By the time the clean up process ends, we find ourselves swearing that we will never do it again. Last week alone we dulled a set of reels following clean up, then bent 2 reels from debris dropped during the coring and sweeping process. If I walked into the office this morning and declared we are core aerating again this week, there would be mutiny!

But outside on the fields the results are evident from the flush of fresh air into the rootzone and proper water infiltration. Green, strong, healthy turf looks like it was 50 degrees last night even though we spent the week in extreme heat.

Ironically as I was writing this, my colleague John Turnour made similar comments about his aggressive core aeration program at Nationals Park in DC. He too feels that the results are as dramatic as I do with the flush of air into the rootzone bringing an immediate plant response with green, vibrant growth and health. From a scientific standpoint, I am sure there is more to the response than just the air component nutrient availability especially. I will research this and let you know... I am intrigued to know myself.

In conclusion, the question becomes... how often does it need to be done? My new goal becomes 1 time a month in the growing season, skipping August unless it catches a cool stretch. So a total 6-8 times. That will total a removal of about 40% of the profile (@ 5% per time). We are at 2 with us to July, so hopefully we can finish at 6.

4 more times, oh boy; don't tell our work crews! ■