



Many superintendents choose to subcontract the job of verticutting and aerifying to companies that specialize in the process

Transition: boom or bust?

BY TOM BENEFIELD, CGCS

There is perhaps no aspect of a superintendent's job performance as caretaker of the golf facility that carries more importance than how they handle the transition periods.

Taking your golf course from warm-

season turf to cool-season turf and then back to warm-season turf has become the most important program for superintendents all over the state.

Often job performance evaluation is centered around this segment of the total turf program.

With the exception of golf courses in the southernmost part of the state, all superintendents must deal with this critical issue each year.

The members expect good playing conditions year round. Yet often due to their demands and expectations, an unfair burden is placed on the people managing the facilities.

It used to be the word transition was applied only to the greens and tee surfaces. However with the increasing competition among clubs for members and revenue, we see many clubs overseeding fairways and roughs. The old saying, "green brings in more green" has never been more true.

In the effort to bring in more green by

It will soon be that time of the year. When all the talk of how great the golf course is turns to, "What did you do to the golf course, I can't recall when I have seen it this bad!"



Slight alterations in irrigation scheduling over a period of time should help ease transition woes.

overseeding larger and larger areas, there has been an increased burden on the superintendent and his cultural programs. When you throw the fickle whims of Mother Nature into the equation, you can end up with disastrous results.

Sometimes the result is top-quality superintendents looking for new positions.

It seems appropriate that we utilize this subject of fall and spring transition as

the editorial focus of this the Spring issue. It is a timely topic for which there is a wealth of information.

To find out how different superintendents from across the state handle this cultural and political issue, we have gathered information throughout our ranks and will share it with you.

Take a month off

It will soon be that time of the year.

A lowering of the mowing height is also in order, and to stimulate the bermudagrass base, we apply ammonium sulfate as needed. After we see the response we are looking for, we will re-adjust our cutting heights for the summer maintenance program.

This program seems to work well for us most of the time.

When all the talk of how great the golf course is turns to, "What did you do to the golf course, I can't recall when I have seen it this bad!"

That kind of talk will be my clue to remind the members that the last time they saw the golf course this bad was last year.

It's that dreaded time of the year again: Transition Time!

It's the time of the year when this superintendent would like to take about a month off.

Our technique at Tampa Palms G&CC to help speed along the transition period is to first cut back on the irrigation of the overseeded areas. Once we see some stress on the overseeded grass, we begin to verticut and aerify to help mechanically remove some of the overseeding.

A lowering of the mowing height is also in order, and to stimulate the bermudagrass base, we apply ammonium sulfate as needed. After we see the re-

sponse we are looking for, we will re-adjust our cutting heights for the summer maintenance program.

This program seems to work well for us most of the time.

In some areas of the golf course however, especially the tee boxes which are Tifgreen 328 bermudagrass, severe thinning can occur.

These areas require additional irrigation and fertilizer to achieve the response we are looking for. Wetting agents are helpful in certain areas where the soils are hard to wet and have become weak from the transition experience.

Education of our membership is important during the transition period.

I believe it is in your best interest to inform the members what is occurring and when they can reasonably expect conditions to return to what they consider normal condition.

If you are fortunate, your course will come out of transition in good shape and be perfect at just about the time to start the process all over again.

*Greg Plotner, CGCS
Tampa Palms Golf Club*



Thinning of turf is the greatest problem during the transition period.

The advantages for Venice G&CC with this approach is that we have fewer closed days for renovations, fewer complaints about “tearing up the course,” and have more effective utilization of irrigation by watering in the fertilizer, sand topdressing and insecticide all in one night.

Interseed with seaside

Our overseeding program consists of bentgrass on greens and ryegrass on the tees.

The process of transition is begun as soon as springtime soil and air temperatures are warm enough to support consistent growth of the base bermudagrass.

At this time we initiate cultural practices to favor the growth of the bermudagrass. These practices include turf grooming, verticutting, fertilization and irrigation timing and amounts.

These programs are continually ad-

justed as conditions require.

Like everyone else, we want to take out the cool-season grasses without experiencing periods of thinned turf on greens and tees.

Our greens are interseeded with seaside bentgrass. By using the interseeding method and seaside bent, the transition becomes easier. Seaside is less heat-tolerant than the “Penns” and other improved bents.

Logically, when temperatures increase, the bentgrass can be taken out without sacrificing turf quality.

Perennial ryegrasses have improved to the point where it is much more difficult to eliminate them from teeing areas in spring.

We follow the same general procedures that are used on the greens. Normally, when the ryegrass finally leaves, there is some recovery time until the bermudagrass can fill the voids.

We have done some experimenting with poa trivialis and will consider using it on tees for an easier transition.

*Lou Conzelman, CGCS
Fiddlesticks CC, Fort Myers*

One wild day a year

At the Venice G&CC, we begin to slowly implement cultural practices during May. We have overseeded tees, par-three approaches, collars and greens.

On the tees, collars and approaches, we verticut with a triplex in two directions once a week.

On the greens we use grooming reels three times a week and verticut once a week. In addition, we apply our spring

During this week we will aerify tees, fairways, and light rough areas. Then on June 2, we deep-tine aerify the greens, verticut tees, verticut fairways and light roughs, topdress greens and tees, fertilize wall to wall and, finally, spray for mole cricket control.

fertilizer to stimulate bermudagrass growth and we minimize irrigation as much as possible.

A new factor we're trying this year is to use the Primo growth regulator. We apply Primo on tees and par three approaches to regulate the ryegrass growth.

Since the growth regulator is foliar uptake, we anticipate very little effect on the 419 bermudagrass as the regulator was applied while the bermuda was shielded by the ryegrass.

We hope this will reduce the competition to determine the dominant turf desired during this transition period.

Our spring cultural practices go beyond the overseeded areas and we also work on fairways and roughs to recover from 200-plus rounds of golf per day we have during the winter season.

The first week in June becomes very busy and this year June 2 is the big day.

During this week we will aerify tees, fairways, and light rough areas. Then on June 2, we deep-tine aerify the greens, verticut tees, verticut fairways and light roughs, topdress greens and tees, fertilize wall to wall and, finally, spray for mole cricket control.

This "wild day" is successful because the work gets done all in one day, result-



Mechanical removal of winter grass by means of aerification will help the bermuda base recover quickly.

ing in the golf course being closed only one day.

About half of the work (the deep-tine aerification, fairway verticutting and custom spraying) is contracted out to the

professionals to make this all possible.

The advantages for Venice G&CC with this approach is that we have fewer closed days for renovations, fewer complaints about "tearing up the course," and have



Light verticutting is an excellent cultural practice which should be done often to open up the overseeding turf canopy for sunlight to reach the summer grass.

more effective utilization of irrigation by watering in the fertilizer, sand topdressing and insecticide all in one night.

We have many factors here at Venice G&CC that make this day successful and hope other clubs weigh all factors if considering such an undertaking in one day. Remember, this will not work for everyone and Plan B is on standby!

*Troy Smith
Venice G&CC*

Problems in the rough

A handful of golf courses in the state

have the unfortunate pleasure of overseeding the entire golf course. Our transition problems occur mostly in the roughs so we will focus on that.

In the rough areas, we lower heights in April to help open up the canopy (1 inch or less) of the perennial ryegrass.

We aerify in mid-May and decrease water enough to stress the ryegrass, but not so much as to stress the bermudagrass.

When temperatures begin to remain in the mid 60s to low 70s at night, we begin to push the bermuda with fertility in hopes that it will out-compete the rye.

With a little luck and a few truckloads of sod, we try to be in decent shape by Aug. 1.

This year we have also purchased an older type of ryegrass. By using a first-generation variety, we hope it will have less tolerance for heat, insect and water so it will check out faster. In recent years the second-generation ryegrasses we utilized were so good that they were not "transitioning" until early July.

Call me this coming July and I'll let you know if this idea has worked!

*Tom Alex
Grand Cypress GC, Orlando*

Generally speaking, transition should coincide with your aerification. Treat it like a grow-in: lots of soluble nitrogen ... lots of water... stick to your daily mowing schedule.

Transition begins in February

I believe the transition actually begins for most of us in February.

Think about it: our grooming practices actually begin to thin the overseeding and expose some bermuda. If the weather is warmer, more grooming or — in some

**We must prepare the bermuda base
So we can make the change with grace
We can't delay for time is pressing
To verticut and apply topdressing.
So, when we play this dreaded date.
Don't force the turf too long to wait.
Mother Nature will give no quarter.
Grass needs food, and air, and water.**

Taking a position on the act of transition or ... It's not nice to fool Mother Nature

I find myself in an awkward position, Trying to write about "Spring Transition."

For Spring has sprung a month ago, And change began as well you know.

Beneath the soil the roots are sluffing. Green blades above their weakness bluffing.

The time to act is now, says I. Please Mr. chairman, let me aerify!

You ask if I must start so soon?
I cannot hold back spring 'til June!
New roots and shoots will come calling,
While, with tournaments, you are stalling.

We must prepare the bermuda base
So we can make the change with grace.
We can't delay for time is pressing
To verticut and apply topdressing.

So, when we play this dreaded date,
Don't force the turf too long to wait.
Mother Nature will give no quarter.
Grass needs food, and air, and water.

I know the greens won't putt the same,
But if we wait, whom will you blame?
When one hot day before your eyes,
The sun cooks all our bents and ryes.

*Joel D. Jackson, CGCS
Disney's Magnolia GC*

No set solution

Like many of you, each year I hope for a smooth transition from winter overseeding to base bermudagrass.

Again, like many of you, I do what I can to contribute to this changeover and encourage the type of growth that I desire.

cases — brushing is necessary.

Most of us reduce our fungicide rates, slightly increase fertilization and continue to lower the height of cut. So, let's face it, if we didn't aggressively do these simple things, the overseeded grass would dominate.

When it's time to really force transition, I find it necessary to verticut in four directions: two ways with the triplex and two ways with 22-inch walking greensmowers.

I'll follow up with aerification using $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch or $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch tines and simplex-brush the sand from the plugs back in. This does leave some debris (rhizomes, stolons, thatch and grass) on the surface.

However, I'm convinced that the sand in these plugs is an important greensmix or topdressing. Why haul it away when we've already paid for it at least once?

We also apply any soil amendments at this time. Routinely I will adjust the pH, alter hydrophobic spots with water-holding polymers and fertilize with natural organic fertilizers.

The result to all of this effort is usually a stronger, more prevalent bermudagrass plant.

However, the bentgrass certainly responds well to these programs too! So...we continue to groom, verticut, fertilize, dry out and lower the height of cut until we overseed again.

What a vicious cycle.

*Steve Wright, CGCS
Alaqua CC, Longwood*

Weather is the controlling factor

Making the transition from cool-sea-

son playing surfaces to warm-season playing surfaces is an annual guessing game in North Florida. There are things that can be done culturally to speed up or slow down the process, but weather is the controlling factor.

Ideally, the nighttime temperatures need to be in the 50- to 60-degree range, with daytime highs in the 80- to 90-degree range.

"Consistently" is the key word. It is not uncommon in North Florida to experience nighttime lows in the 40s in May.

Keeping this in mind, most superintendents in the area schedule their aerification in early June. This event, preceded by several weeks of low mowing, light vertical mowing, and increased fertility usually speeds up the transition from cool-season to warm-season grass.

Generally speaking, transition should coincide with your aerification. Treat it like a grow-in: lots of soluble nitrogen ... lots of water... stick to your daily mowing schedule.

And, oh yeah — eat your lunch in your office for a couple of weeks.

*Tom Cowan, CGCS
Deerwood Club, Jacksonville*

To make a long story short, there is not set solution or answer. You must do what you feel best suits your needs and situation, whether it is cutting height, verticutting, fertilization, water or even chemical application to force a species out.

What we fail to remember from time to time is that we often contribute to our own transition headaches by being forced to overlook some of the basic cultural practices mentioned above. For instance, heavy play forces you to take steps that can't help but make the transition more difficult. When you play 95,000 to 100,000 round per year on 18 holes, your turf is undoubtedly under stress!

Naturally, decreased cutting heights, verticutting, increased fertilization rates and decreased irrigation levels encourage the decline of the overseeded cool-season grass and encourage takeover by the warm-season bermudagrass.

This process, in combination with cultivars that naturally have a tendency to exit more gradually, makes our jobs somewhat easier.

What we fail to remember from time to time is that we often contribute to our own transition headaches by being forced to overlook some of the basic cultural practices mentioned above.

For instance, heavy play forces you to take steps that can't help but make the transition more difficult. When you play 95,000 to 100,000 round per year on 18 holes, your turf is undoubtedly under stress!

To overcome this stress, two methods utilized are increased height-of-cut and elevated fertility levels. These practices make transition more difficult, but may be necessary evils.

More than likely my transition will be slower unless continued heavy play in combination with increased temperatures force out the overseeding.

To make a long story short, there is not set solution or answer. You must do what you feel best suits your needs and situation, whether it is cutting height, verticutting, fertilization, water or even chemical application to force a species out.

Not every golf course can be treated the same. The transition cultural practices you choose to utilize must be dic-

tated by your experience and expertise in your particular situation not by Simon Says!

*Marshall Edgren, CGCS
City of St. Petersburg*

As you can see from the testimonials of the previous writers, transition can be a very testy time of the year. The most consistent aspect of the practices of these superintendents is the subject of "less than perfect conditions."

Everyone who goes through spring transition will somewhere on his golf course experience turf conditions which are unacceptable to the golfing membership. In certain instances these problems can be relatively minor occurrences while at other times they can seem like a runaway train with conditions spiraling out of control.

And sometimes the bad conditions are not related to how well a superintendent is handling the transition period.

The most influential factor in a smooth transition is out of the hands of the superintendents; it is of course, Mother Nature.

If the winter is too warm and the spring too cool, the overseeding will be heavily entrenched in the base grass. Under conditions as these, the warm-season grass is not able to overcome the virulent winter grass naturally with the aid of cultural practices normally utilized

for the transition period

The result in this scenario can be uncontrollable thinning of the turf accompanied by a sharp tongue from the greens chairman.

This situation is where the ability to speak and relate to your members concerns will come in handy.

Superintendents must reach out to the members and educate them. It is most important, particularly when the chips are down.

When events have overtaken your programs and have forced you into alternate programs, you must walk the pro shop floor daily, seek out and confront your detractors in a professional manner. Take time to educate them on what the true story is.

Remember, innuendo can bury you.

Remember also that the darkest hour is just before the dawn, and transition is no exception.

The spring transition time also marks the time when the fun starts: it leads into summer and fall, when you do all your cultural practices. It kicks off the summer months when your special projects will be accomplished. It gets you ready for the catcalls from the members which will come later in June as the mole crickets devour your turf and turn once-brilliant stands of fairway turf into mushy, roll-the-ball-to-a-green, spotted turf.

Spring is an eternal event — an event that offers hope of a better tomorrow, hope of sunny days with a fair breeze and quenching evening thunderstorms.

It is the springboard to the rest of the year, it is the most beautiful time of year with trees and plants of all varieties coming forth with new life and to put away the old. It is inspiration and unfortunately short-lived but never forgotten.

Remember this the next time your members castigate you for the unfortunate spring transition of the turf.

Speak to them kindly, educate them humbly and then ask them to walk with you in one of the world's greatest parks, stopping along the way and smell the roses.

The spring transition time also marks the time when the fun starts