

Floratex: First Year Impressions

BY SCOTT BELL, GCS

Bent Pine G.C.

The Indian River Soccer Association in Vero Beach decided that the players deserved their own soccer fields. For many years the fledgling association played on whatever substandard fields they could find. The turf almost always was bahiagrass and, depending on the time of the year, it was a blessing if the grass had been mowed.

Fire ant mounds were common obstructions and holes and sand spots posed constant threats. The association and Indian River County finally reached an agreement for the association to build fields on county land.

In 1995 land was cleared and fill was brought in. The local chapter of the Florida Irrigation Society installed the irrigation system consisting of a 4-inch artesian well with a 10 hp pump and Toro 2000 heads. By September 1995 the

irrigation system was complete, the electric power was installed and the final grade was established.

Quality Grassing installed the FloraTex sprigs, and Roger Welker grew in the fields.

Unfortunately we got a late start due to some circumstances beyond our control, and we entered November with month-old sprigs. Luckily we had a warm enough fall to get a fairly decent cover before winter.

Roger employed a grow-in program similar to that used to grow-in a golf course, with a heavy reliance on ammonium sulfate and other fast-release fertilizers. By late December the decision was made to overseed the fields to give them color and to fill any voids that existed. The fields were seeded at about 250 pounds per acre, and that gave a good cover for our first season. By April the ryegrass was fading and the FloraTex was starting to grow.

I considered last summer to be the true grow-in period. I did a couple of fertilizer applications in June and Sep-

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tember and we got the turf fully covered. The soil that had been used as fill was full of rocks and debris which kept surfacing all summer, causing damage to the mower. By fall most of the rocks and debris were gone and the fields were in great shape for the fall season.

The Indian River Soccer Association Fields consist of one large adult field, two under 12-year-old fields, two under 10-year-old fields, three under 8-year-old fields and three under 6-year-old fields. These take up 14 acres. Games are played on Saturdays and Sundays. There have been weeks where there have been over 50 games a weekend.

FloraTex has impressed me particu-



- Minimal damage to course.
- Minimal labor to replace bunker sand creates opportunity costs.

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larly for sports fields though I also think that it could have some golf course applications. The grass has very good drought tolerance as most Bermudas do. What I really noticed is how tight this grass is.

The stolons do not get leggy like 419 can. The grass looks as good at the beginning of the season as it does at the end. It can take the abuse of the kids playing the games and it still looks great.

I think that because it is so tight it doesn't damage easily.

Perhaps FloraTex's greatest asset is its ability to resist the cold and stay green. The field is unprotected and susceptible to the wind. I've noticed that the fields turn off-color later and they green up faster than my golf course.

It has been very interesting managing this new grass. I would recommend it for any sports turf use. FloraTex should be given a chance on sports fields and common areas.

EDUCATION

Earn While You Learn

Some of the most consistent advice that successful superintendents offer over and over again is to "never stop learning," "learn something new every day," "the more you know the more you grow."

Here is the latest schedule of university-level regional seminars to be held in Florida for the remainder of the year. If you can't travel far, these seminars will provide great information for your personal and professional growth and development and also meet CEU recertification requirements for certified superintendents.

1997 GCSAA Regional Seminar Schedule in Florida

August 6, 1997. "Enhancing Your Value as a Professional Golf Course Superintendent" at the Palm Beach Holiday Inn. Co-hosted by the Palm Beach GCSA.

September 4, 1997 "Lake and Aquatic Plant Management" Tampa Convention Center or Hyatt Regency. Co-hosted by the FGCSA on the day before the opening of the Florida Turfgrass Association Conference.

November 20 & 21, 1997 "Managing People for Peak Performance and Job Satisfaction" at the Royal Caribbean Resort. Co-hosted by the Central Florida GCSA (first two-day seminar!).

December 4, 1997 "Improving your Negotiating Skills" at The Meadows. Co-hosted by the North Florida GCSA.

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