



Successful Transition from Overseeding takes...

Planning, Preparation, Patience

After the disaster of El Nino last year, I think the topic of transition made a few people gun shy about contributing on this subject, but I managed to find a few brave souls who offered some comments about what they hope to achieve during the 1999 transition phase of overseeding management.

I found some common threads running through their comments: Planning was one, with grass variety selection being a key ingredient at the Grand Cypress and Celebration Golf Clubs followed by booking maintenance schedules a year in advance.

Preparation was next and that covers everything from having healthy turf in the fall going into overseeding to managing cultural practices in the spring.

And last but not least, patience! Patience in dealing with changing growing conditions... in letting your turf cover dictate the timing of some of your practices... in taking into account that with these persistent new grass varieties, maybe we should be calling it "summer transition" instead of spring transition.

Given normal conditions, it's relatively easy to grow turf in the dead of winter and the dead of summer.

But when the sun crosses the equator twice a year and the seasons begin to change, Florida superintendents are asked to maintain good playing condi-

tions while growing two or three different types of grasses at the same time. That's when patience by superintendents and golfers alike pays off.

JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

little more seed here and there, babied it a little bit and we always got there.

"Last year we never made it and we had a rough winter. I've never had so much explaining to do about course conditions

to company officials and the pro shop for the guests in my entire 15 years.

"That experience made me realize that you'd better have a sense of urgency about getting the overseed established before the heavy play season starts. We are a resort and driven by our seasonal play. Guests arriving from up North for some high-priced winter golf don't care if you just had 40 inches of rain in 60 days, and they don't want explanations either.

"I will say this and then we can move on: My management team is pretty well educated about the

business. They trust me and they play a lot of golf at other places. They knew we weren't the only place having some problems. I used the reports from the USGA and from Dr. Elliott to give them the scientific agronomic reasons we were struggling with thin turf.

"January was the worst of it because we had to have tournament conditions in place for the LPGA HealthSouth event. We wore the place out. After that we started to slowly improve. Like I said, I thought we were bullet proof!

"Hello!"

Learning those tough lessons from El Nino, Alex is going to try a couple of things to ease the management of his



Grand Cypress superintendent Tom Alex shows the two different ryegrasses used in the seed blend applied to the rough. The larger "intermediate rye" plant on the right should transition quicker in the spring, giving the bermudagrass a better chance to fill in. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Tough Lessons Generate Some New Ideas

Tom Alex has been the superintendent/manager/director of golf course maintenance at the Grand Cypress Golf Club for the past 15 years. Known for the excellent conditioning of his golf courses, Alex admitted that last year's overseeding season was a real eye opener. It's difficult not to frame some of the practices we use in relation to what happened during El Nino last year.

"Going into last year, I always thought we were bulletproof," he said. "We have the resources and the talent to respond to unusual conditions. We always dusted a

overseeding from establishment to transition.

"Our biggest problem areas have always been our roughs," he said. The short-cut areas like greens, tees, and fairways do well under normal circumstances: as the weather warms up, the host bermudagrass does its thing and the overseeding dies out.

"But in the roughs with the taller heights of cut, the high traffic areas often require sod replacement. This year we're going to try a ryegrass blend in the roughs that is 50 percent perennial and 50 percent intermediate rye. The intermediate rye has characteristics similar to annual rye and we hope it will start checking out a little sooner to allow the bermudagrass to get more sunlight and warmth in the spring.

"On the greens we are going to continue a practice that worked well for us last year. In the past we had always renovated the greens aggressively beginning in mid-May when our greens fee rates went down. We would pull cores, verticut, clean up, top dress and drag.

"Some years that was OK... if it was a cool spring. But if it was real hot and dry we could end up wiping out all the *Poa triv.* When the *Poa* goes, it goes quick.

"Last year in May we just deep solid-tined the greens with the Verti-Drain and then rolled them. The deep tining gave the bermudagrass roots a chance to develop and we didn't damage the overseeding on top.

"We ran our fungicide program a little longer which helped the bentgrass in our mix. The *Poa triv.* melted out naturally with the onset of warmer weather. With rain and washing last year, and all the extra

seed we put down, we had quite a few thin areas we thought we would have to sod, but we only had two small areas we had to do. So we're going to try that process again this year."

Speaking of sodding, former years of wall-to-wall overseeding had led to a lot of resodding the roughs at Grand Cypress. The caravans of sod trucks going into the property were almost legendary. Alex has developed a strategy for dealing with transition in the rough.

"Around Easter we start lowering the rough cut down to one inch. That doesn't scalp or hurt the bermudagrass too much and reduces the rye canopy to allow sunlight and heat to help any bermudagrass that's there.

"In mid-May, with the reduction in greens fees, we double verticut the fairways and aerify the fairways and roughs. We apply a 1:0:1 fertilizer like a 15-0-15 with 50 percent slow-release nitrogen. Then we get in a truckload of ammonium sulfate and begin to scout and spot-fertilize the rough areas we think we can grow back in during transition."

"This is decision-making time. When the temperatures start to go up, we closely watch the dew patterns in the roughs. Lots of dew means lots of bermudagrass. In places where we have 50 percent dew, we will spot-fertilize weekly like a grow-in situation to bring them back.

"In the areas where we aren't seeing any dew patterns in the rye, we will start resodding. Those areas are usually the cartpath-to-fairway, high-traffic areas. If you don't see any bermudagrass down in there in April, you sure won't have any

in late May or June when a hot spell takes out the rye.

"We start the sodding process even with a good rye cover to avoid having to do it all at once in an emergency situation. This way we can do a truck or two at a time. We don't burn out the crew laying sod and we can manage and establish the new sod more easily."

In the area of weed control, Alex has a different approach from most. He has eliminated the spring preemergent application, and relies on a vigilant and persistent post-emergent spot-treatment program.

"Our spray techs will go through the courses weekly with a range of products usually Illoxan, MSMA, Basagran or 2,4, D. They scout and spot-treat only the problem areas. In the fall, we do pre-emerge with Kerb on the fairways and Surflan in the fairway bunkers, pine straw areas and ornamental beds. Any seed that gets into the greens bunkers is mechanically removed.

"We treat the fairways with Kerb for *Poa annua* control 60 days before overseeding. We don't charcoal them. Actually we have gotten the lead time down to 45 days before seeding with no adverse effects. I did an experiment a few years ago to check the interval. We applied some Kerb and then came back and seeded some rye from two to five weeks after the Kerb application. Germination seemed to be OK after three weeks.

"My intention on the fairways is just to control the overall population of *Poa annua*. Will we have some? Yes, but it won't get away from us. It is a livable

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threshold and we are being cost effective? While our post-emerge chemical costs are up some, the overall result by eliminating one preemergent application has saved us maybe 25-30 percent in chemical costs."

Summing up the topic, Alex said, "Dwight Kummer at Bay Hill put it best when he said, 'Think about all the practices we do when we have normal conditions. We can get by. But when conditions go sour and we try to maintain the same practices, we can have major failures.'

"That shows you how close to the edge we keep everything all the time. Two weeks of low sunlight and heavy play and all of a sudden you're in trouble. Last year kind of drove that nail home to me.

"Listen guys! Pay attention! I mean it's what we have to do. It's our business, but when the weather gets bad you'd better respond. Raise the heights of cut. Punch some holes. Watch your fungicide levels and keep those pin locations moving."

After a two-hour interview and ride around the course a final comment from as only Tommy can put it, "Are we done? You should get a paragraph out of that!"

Editors Note: *The Grand Cypress Golf Club will be one of the stops on the GCSAA Turfgrass Tour during the conference and show in February 1999.*

Poa Triv Plays Well, Exits Gracefully at Celebration

John De Matteo has been the superintendent at the new Disney Celebration Golf Club since it opened in April,



Superintendent John De Matteo checks the progress of the Poa triv germination in a fairway at the Celebration Golf Club. This is the third year in a row that De Matteo has seeded his fairways with Poa trivialis. Photo by Joel Jackson.

1996. Prior to that John was a regional superintendent for American Golf, responsible for eight courses in New York. John also spent eight years working as a technical representative for Loft Seed, Inc.

De Matteo has a different approach to overseeding than most, which helps set up his transition program.

"When we opened in 1996 we didn't want to have a lot of competition with the new bermudagrass, so we overseeded the entire course with *Poa trivialis*. We have

since modified our practices to use perennial ryegrass in the roughs to give better definition and contrast to the fairways which are still 100 percent *Poa trivialis*.

"I am also using ryegrass on the tees for better wear tolerance. The greens are still 100 percent *Poa trivialis*.

"There several reasons we still use *Poa trivialis* on the fairways.

"First and foremost is the way it transitions once the weather warms up. As the bermudagrass gets stronger with the heat, the *Poa trivialis* melts out, providing less

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