

Florida, The Eagle Has Landed

Green Side Up



Joel Jackson, CGCS
Editor

Cashing in on the name recognition of the "Tif" (Tifton, Ga.) brand name, it appears that TifEagle is becoming the most popular of the new ultradwarf grasses. For those willing to take a leap of faith with the new ultra-low-growing turfgrasses, TifEagle is the name I'm hearing most when courses are electing to use an ultradwarf for new

construction or renovating old, contaminated greens.

Not all Tifdwarf greens suffer from mutations. Those courses who have not had off-type problems with their Tifdwarf greens, are often electing to stay the course and replant with foundation Tifdwarf material. They are still maintaining a wait-and-see attitude since the new grasses are still relatively young. Growing the new ultradwarf varieties requires

changing some of your old Tifdwarf habits and getting used to new turf responses to environmental and cultural practices. There's no denying they can be cut lower, but that's only part of the story.

But courses that have suffered through the puffy, scalpny greens with off-type contamination are looking for some relief if they're going to the expense of regrassing. There are several varieties to choose from out there in the marketplace, but the Georgia boys have got turf history and tradition on their side and they have steam rolled the competition lately.

Champion, the Texas version of the new ultradwarfs took the stage first and, being first out of the blocks, had an advantage. With an aggressive marketing and planting plan and good customer service, Champion still has a strong following. I know a Florida superintendent who learned to grow it at one

course, and elected to plant it at his new course as well. Familiarity sometimes does breed content.

Florida's entry in the ultradwarf wars produced the variety called FloraDwarf. Those who grow it like it and in many side-by-side comparisons, the pros and cons of each of the new varieties seem to balance out overall. But there's no denying that a recognizable brand name coupled with a strong, organized marketing campaign have made TifEagle the number-one seller to date.

It would seem to me that the Florida sod producers might think more about organizing like their Georgia colleagues in order to promote Florida-bred grasses and to plow back royalties from sales into the Florida Turfgrass Association's Research Foundation. Sort of a self-sustaining concept. As for-profit businesses, they already have sales and marketing contacts in place unlike the Turfgrass Association, but I guess that would take a lot of teamwork among traditional competitors. Wonder how those "Dawgs" have been able to scoop the "Gators" all these years when it comes to grass sales?

But all the buzz and hype doesn't mean a thing if you're choosing any of these grasses in the blind. The best thing to do is to plant test plots all of the varieties you are considering — whether Tifdwarf or the ultradwarfs. Subject them to the same maintenance regimes and hopefully wear patterns. A putting green is probably the best site to use. Grow them for at least a year and then make up your own mind, by selecting a grass that best fits your club's lifestyle, budget and your work ethic.

Meanwhile, as we really enter the new millennium on Jan. 1, 2001, I urge you to resolve to take a more active role in your professional association. There are issues that need your attention and they will be easier to address if we all work together to find solutions.

Happy New Year to one and all.