

USGA UPDATE

Brown Turf is OK

By Todd Lowe

Chances are, many Florida golf courses have had some significant dry spots this past spring. Florida experiences a normal dry cycle each year at this time. It has also been very breezy this spring and we just had near-record-high temperatures for the Memorial Day weekend. Many golf courses have not had a “good” soaking rain for several months. Even with the most sophisticated irrigation system or water-savvy superintendent, the prolonged dry spell causes some degree of discoloration on golf courses. The relative humidity has been predictably low for this time of year and the dry weather is causing bermudagrass turf to turn yellow to brown on many golf courses throughout the region. For the most part, the brown areas occur as isolated patches throughout the golf course and are accentuated by one or more of the following stresses:

Localized Dry Spots: Sand particles become coated with organic substances and these coated particles repel water (hydrophobic) as they dry out. This causes the turf to become brown from drought stress. Rewetting localized dry spots is a difficult task and the most effective program is to apply wetting agents preventively every three to four weeks, usually through the irrigation (fertigation) system. Although a difficult task, the goal is to prevent the soil from becoming dry. Irrigation efficiency/uniformity is very important as areas that receive less irrigation are the first to exhibit localized dry spots.

Nematodes: Nematodes have been active since early spring and aboveground symptoms have been apparent on our visits over the past few weeks. There is no way to eradicate nematodes and the best nematicides suppress nematode populations, temporarily improving root growth. However, it is just as important to improve cultural practices in nematode-stressed areas to maintain turfgrass quality. In particular, irrigation and fertility frequency should be increased to compensate for the lack of roots. Also, cart traffic should be reduced as stress becomes apparent.

Salt Accumulation: With the lack of rain, salts have been accumulating in the upper rootzone, making it difficult for roots to extract water from the soil. In addition to routine gypsum/lime applications, occasional flushing (leaching) of the root zone is necessary at this time of year to move salts away from turfgrass roots.

Concentrated Cart Traffic: Golf carts are an integral part of the game of golf but it is necessary to restrict traffic to cart paths at certain times. Like most creatures, golfers follow the path of least resistance and often travel in similar patterns from hole to hole. Heavy traffic removes leaf tissue and eventually destroys turfgrass growing points (crowns). These areas become thin over time as the turfgrass dies out from constant leaf removal. Soil becomes very compacted and extreme measures of tilling, regrassing and/or amendments of crumb rubber to these areas must be taken

“Green is good, brown is bad” is the mentality of many golfers, thinking the golf course should never lose its lush, green color. Unless the stress is being caused by a major pest like an insect, disease or a misplaced tree, some brown turf is O.K. from time to time. After all, golf is a sport and good playing conditions occur less often on pretty, green golf courses. It



Poor irrigation coverage is accentuated on this overseeded fairway during the dry season. Photo by Todd Lowe

is also important for golfers to realize that cart traffic is an additional stress and if brown turf is not desired, then eliminating cart traffic in these areas hastens recovery.

The bright side for our region is that most of these stresses subside as we experience summer rains that begin in June. Routine rainfall leaches salts from soil and provides water to the turf, which improves overall turf health.

GCSAA News

Committee Operations Begin Under New Governance Structure

The 2004 Strategic Communications Committee is one of the first GCSAA committees to operate under a new structure that analyzes issues from a strategic rather than an operational orientation. GCSAA Secretary/Treasurer Sean Hoolehan, CGCS is the chairman of this committee. Flowing from the committee are task groups that will focus on operational issues. Non-directors are chairpersons for the Task Groups.

Task Groups under the Strategic Communications Committee:

- Media Information Task Group – Chairman Ken Magnum, CGCS
- Chapter/Member Media Tools Task Group – Chairman James R. Fitzroy, CGCS
- Technical Assistance Task Group – Chairman Rick Tegtmeier, CGCS
- Publications Use and Positioning Task Group – Chairman Joel Jackson, CGCS
- Messaging/Brand Strategies Task Group – Chairman Jonathan Jennings, CGCS
- Online Properties Use and Positioning Task Group – Chairman Richard Lavine, CGCS

At the April meeting of the Strategic Communications Committee, the following questions/topics were discussed. These outcomes from the meeting reflect the discussions and presentations.

Professional Development Session

Dr. Max Utsler, professor of mass communications at the University of Kansas,