Winter simply kills Southeastern courses

By MARK LESLIE

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Golf course superintendents are taking different tacks in bringing their courses back to life after a devastating winter killed crippled or killed their Bermudagrass. Their options: sod/sprig Bermudagrass or replace their stands with zoysiagrass.

Most courses are not expected to fully recover until August or September.

"It's pretty major," said Patrick O'Brien, director of the Southeast Region of the U.S. Golf Association Green Section. "Tennesseese was probably the hardest hit area, along with the western Carolinas and Kentucky. Atlanta was hit pretty hard. I was at Nags Head, N.C., right on the Atlantic where temperatures are usually moderate, and it was devastated."

The major culprit was a fateful, three-day period in mid-January. Superintendent Jerry Lemons of Old Hickory Country Club in Hermitage said that on Jan. 11 it was 59 degrees. "We had two inches of rain, and in 24 hours it was minus-2 degrees. It stayed below freezing for 72 hours. That knocked it [Bermudagrass] out — killed it. Anyone who had poor drainage and cut their Bermudagrass at tee height lost it."

It remained cold for almost two weeks. Then, many areas received an ice storm. The blanket of ice stayed on the ground for four or five days, driving the cold deep into the soil and continued on page 23.

State gives bucks to boost Clemson research

By MARK LESLIE

CLEMSON, S.C. — Recognizing the turf industry ignites South Carolina's economy, the state Legislature has allocated $530,000 a year to help expand Clemson University's turfgrass program. "It's exciting to get new money in this kind of economy," said Dr. John Kelly, chairman of the Horticulture Department, adding that another $379,000 was approved for the state university's ornamental horticulture program. "All across the country, university budgets have been cut. The Legislature was sending a clear message: When it comes to economic development-type activity, turf is a huge trigger in South Carolina."

A recent survey found the turfgrass/golf course industry is worth about $641 million to the South Carolina economy. The state sports 339 golf courses.

Recognizing the significance of environmental stewardship to the turf industry, Kelly said, "Our intent in getting the funding was to address environmental problems faced by that industry and to expand the programming around solving those problems through research and public service, or Extension programs."

The South Carolina Turfgrass Foundation, primarily composed of superintendents, was a key player in lobbying for the funds.

Clemson had asked for $913,000, and the House and Senate had agreed upon $780,000 until a major waste site clean-up forced across-the-board cuts.

Officials are rethinking the plan based on $913,000, and Kelly said, "Still, we will be able to do quite a bit. The university is committed to not tying all the money up in salaries, he said.

A portion "will remain in program enhancement so the existing faculty will have continued on page 21.
Superintendent's first two words on new job: 'Course closed'

Superintendents throughout the Southeast share their thoughts with Patrick O'Brien as he travels, making Turf Advisory Visits (TAVs) as director of the Southeast Region for the U.S. Golf Association Green Section. Here are some comments following this year's massive winter kill.

"On Jan. 14th I started my new job at the Capital City Club [in Atlanta, Ga.]. My first two words on the job were "course closed.""

— William Shirley

It was amazing. Our soil froze to a depth of six inches, and our course is adjacent to the ocean! Our Tifway Bermudagrass suffered extensive damage at fairways and tees, and especially at stress sites with higher traffic, poor drainage, shade, and past insect and drought damage.

— David Bentley of Duck Woods CC in Kitty Hawk, N.C.

"I was so surprised to see our Vamont Bermudagrass winter-killed. After our TAV visit, our green committee decided to row-

Winter kill devastates many courses in Southeast

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killing stolons and rhizones, according to O'Brien.

Compaction played a major role as well, said superintendent Andy Brennan of Springhouse Golf Course at the Opryland Hotel. "Wherever traffic is funneled, it's dead," he said.

And superintendent Doug Ward at Belle Meade Country Club added, "If it [Bermudagrass] was mowed under an inch, you had some damage problems."

I saw clubs with very little damage and others with 70 acres," O'Brien said.

Dan Gibson, superintendent of golf operations for the Metro Board of Parks and Recreation, said he lost 70 acres on the city's seven courses.

"Most everybody still looks bad because we haven't had warm weather," O'Brien said in early June. "If you are springing, the sprigs are sitting there doing nothing because of the mild weather. If you resodded, you're looking pretty good."

A number of superintendents have sodded over tees and around greens. The cold-hardy bentgrass greens are "some of the best greens ever," O'Brien said. "They're beautiful."

Meanwhile, superintendents who last fall overseeded with ryegrass face a unique struggle.

"It's a Catch-22 situation," said Brennan, who wanted to keep the ryegrass alive through the PGA Senior Tour event at Springhouse, June 13-19.

Unseasonably cool weather in late May and early June helped the ryegrass fairways, but the Bermudagrass roughs, which were weakened but alive, "needed to be kicking a little bit, and the temperatures aren't cooperating," Brennan said. "What's good for the ryegrass isn't good for the Bermuda, and vice versa."

He said he would be springing his course with Bermudagrass if he didn't have to keep the ryegrass alive for the Tour event.

The ryegrass in the region was thriving in the cool weather, and that was inhibiting recovery of any damaged Bermudagrass areas, O'Brien said. "Those guys should, if possible, do practices to discourage the ryegrass so they can evaluate their situations," he said.

"Courses with ryegrass in the fairways can play to the hill," Gibson said. "But it's camouflage, and in July they will have to spring, too."

Making the best of a bad situation, many superintendents are experimenting.

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I have already worked with several clubs that have elected to switch horses from Bermudagrass to zoysia. They are taking a long-term approach.

— Patrick O'Brien

"I have already worked with several clubs that have elected to switch horses from Bermudagrass to zoysia," O'Brien said. "They are taking a long-term approach. This will certainly lessen the potential for winter damage at these courses, I never thought a lot would do that. But they are now."

Lemons said many superintendents are trying some of the new seeded varieties of Bermudagrasses. He has planted a half acre each of the Meyer and El Toro zoysias, and will plant 450 square feet each of three of Dr. Milt Engelke's cultivars from Texas A&M "to test them in fairway situations.

The rest of our course we put in springs of a new 'QuickStand' Bermudagrass from Dr. A.J. Powell at the University of Kentucky."

O'Brien said resprigging zoysia can be costly: $1,800 to $2,000 per acre for 800 bushels, plus the cost of one or two applications of Roundup at five quarts to the acre. The cost to resprig to Bermudagrass, he said, would be $800 to $800 per acre (at a rate of 700 to 800 bushels per acre).

Meanwhile, lost play is also expected to knock out Bermudagrass, further reducing recovery of the Bermudagrass, further reducing Bermudagrass injury.

"Unfortunately, overseeding provides practically no protection against extracellular injury," O'Brien said. Carrow said that even in winters with partial kill, overseeding always slows down the recovery of the remaining Bermudagrass. In historically weak Bermudagrass areas — such as shade lines, high-traffic tees and fairways, etc. — overseeding is actually  for inhibiting recovery of the Bermudagrass the next spring, he said. For these reasons, fairway overseeding should be used mainly at resort courses in the warmer areas of the Southeast.

Patrick O'Brien is director of the Southeast Region of the U.S. Golf Association Green Section.

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