MAINTENANCE

Atlanta Athletic Club reports success with new sterilization method

DULUTH, Ga. — Even a great golf course needs a makeover once in awhile. That's what Atlanta Athletic Club officials decided in 1994, when they took the plunge to bring the greens of The Highlands, built in 1968 with 1968 technology, into the present.

"We needed to replace the Penncross bentgrass with the more heat-tolerant Crenshaw," said superintendent Robert Waller.

But the task of updating The Highlands, host to the 1976 U.S. Open and the 1981 PGA Championship, was far more than putting in a dense, upright-growing grass species that could withstand the Atlanta summers. Golf course architect Rees Jones was brought in to design the new greens, culminating in a complete remodeling and rebuilding of the entire green complexes, from the putting surfaces to 50 yards out into the fairways. Calgolf of Montclair, N.J., handled the remodel project.

The new greens also benefited from 1990s construction technology, including a new technique that simplified the fumigation process and trimmed a full week off the time it traditionally takes to get a green seeded and ready to go, Waller said.

"Time was absolutely important to us," he said, "and this process sped up, by seven days, the time from a green being shaped to being seeded."

Atlanta AC contracted with Trans-American Soil Blenders Inc. of Lubbock, Texas, to blend a mix of 83 percent sand, 15 percent Irish peat moss and 2 percent Proline soil amendment, plus lime and a minor nutrient package for the greens. The new twist was the way the greensmix was sterilized; with the addition during blending, before construction, of Basamid granular soil fumigant in a process developed by TransAmerican and the golf services advisors of BASF Agricultural Products.

BASF manufactures Basamid, a non-restricted-use granular formulation that doesn't activate until mixed with organic material and sand. Once mixed with a homogenous mix of sand and peat, or other organic matter that has been air-fluffed or air-shredded for uniformity, the granules are converted into active substances that diffuse through the greensmix as a gas to eliminate germinating weed seeds, parasitic nematodes and soil-borne diseases.

According to the protocol established by BASF and TransAmerican, Basamid is added to the soil mix at a rate of 7 to 10 ounces per ton of greensmix about six weeks before use in the green cavity to allow time for proper fumigation and activation, said Troy McNeill, president of TransAmerican. A germination test should be run on the mix to ensure that no residue of the fumigant remains before putting the mix into the greens, he said.

"As soon as the greensmix goes into the shell, it's ready to seed," Waller said. "This is where the time- and labor-saving occurs versus fumigating the greens mix after green construction. "With the old way, once you had the perfect green just as you wanted it, you had to tear it up and just about start over. With Basamid, we don't have to do the work twice."

During the remodeling, the entire green complexes were rebuilt on nine holes at a time in the summers of 1994 and 1995. "The greens turned out great," Waller said. "We were mowing them at nine days, with no weed or disease problems, then or later."

"What is good is, now we have another option that works as well, if not better, than the old technique," Waller said, referring to methyl bromide, which will not be allowed sometime in the future. McNeill likes that Basamid is a non-restricted non-ozone-depleting product that helps him deliver a complete greensmix that produces a quality green. Waller acknowledged that some people may choose not to sterilize their greensmix at all, if they know they have clean sand from a known source and clean seed. But weeding or disease problems, then or later."

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