

DRIVING RANGE MAINTENANCE

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Inverness Club currently has two practice facilities. We have a traditional driving range adjacent to the first tee and a short game practice facility a small distance from the golf shop. Each of these facilities is different and requires a totally different management regime.

The short game facility has Pennlinks creeping bent greens, tees and fairways. This is a magnificent facility designed by Arthur Hills and Associates in 1990. There are 15,000 square feet of USGA chipping greens and 35,000 square feet of bent tee and fairways. Five bunkers, numerous mounds and an additional 25,000 square feet of bluegrass rough surround the area. Art Hills designed this facility so that a wide variety of short game chipping, pitching and cut shots could be practiced. The facility is used in a very informal manner with no real regimented tee. Several players can practice at the same time without interfering with each other. Teeing areas are maintained to resemble the fairways. Since there is no regimented tee area, divots occur in clusters throughout the facility. Each morning, divots are hand raked and removed by Inverness staff, prior to mowing. Divots are then filled with a soil seed mix. This divot mix is always available in the practice area for those who would like to repair their own divots. There is no charge to the members for the use of this facility.

The real focus of this talk is our driving range tee. I think if there is a weak spot at Inverness Club it would be the range and range tee. We recently erected a 72 foot high fence to stop balls from leaving the property. We are currently planning a major range renovation to hopefully begin in late July.

Range clubs have become popular over the last few years. It makes good financial sense for the golf professional, and is certainly more convenient for the members. Range clubs encourage the use of the practice facility and to a certain extent, reduce the amount of traffic on the golf course.

The down side is the increased use of the facility. Increased amount of traffic means more divots, greater wear and less recovery time. I feel that the practice tee at Inverness is currently too small. The tee is 200 feet wide and will accommodate approximately 25 people at one time. We have a total of 30,000 square feet of range tee. This is barely sufficient for about three weeks use if managed properly. The range is in operation a minimum of six days a week from 7:30 A.M. until dark. This leaves little time for the golf course staff to maintain the tee. Drainage is also a problem on our current range tee. Our proposed new tee would be 55,000 square feet, with an isolated teaching tee at the opposite end of the range. This would afford some privacy during lessons as well as free up additional tee spots currently being used by lessons during peak use periods.

Our driving range tee is ryegrass. I have always felt that the range tee should replicate the golf course fairways as much as possible. Unfortunately, I have had a very difficult time maintaining a bentgrass range tee. Several years ago our range tee was sodded to Pencross creeping bent in late fall. The tee was reopened April 1st and was totally destroyed within one month. At that point I tried to reestablish the bent grass through seed, but was not able to establish healthy, strong bentgrass within the three week rotation period. We eventually opted to overseed the range tee to perennial ryegrass. The primary advantage of perennial ryegrass is that it can quickly be established for a usable teeing surface.

The key thing to managing a small teeing area is proper tee rotation. Members are directed and obligated to only use the teeing area delineated by bag stands and directional boards. These boards have effectively controlled people misaligning and hitting balls towards adjacent fairways or neighboring property. The golf shop staff makes certain that the bag stands are properly located and aimed for each day's use. They also make certain that an ample supply of balls are washed, bagged, and ready for the members use.

We rotate the tee from front to back. I feel front to back is superior since players are less likely to walk over newly seeded areas and, more importantly, by moving back the next day's tee spot is not littered with divots from the previous day. Typically, each location can be used two days before moving the tee back. Every other

day the tee is moved laterally and every other day the tee is moved back. This rotation is critical to efficiently utilizing the limited tee space available. I must have at least three weeks to regenerate the teeing area.

Ideally, seeding is done at weekly intervals, usually on Monday when the club is closed. Since we are moving the tee backwards, we would be overseeding directly in front of potential users so seeding must be done when the tee is closed.

As mentioned earlier, I have elected to use perennial ryegrass for the seeding operation. When selecting a ryegrass it is important to select a variety with a low, buried crown and profuse basal tillering. The lower crown allows the grass to tolerate scalp from mowers, but more importantly, scalp that occurs from divots. Basal tillering allows regrowth of established plants in an almost "creeping" fashion. Another consideration is the size of the seed. It is economical to purchase more seeds per pound, and I find it easier to bury and keep moist a smaller seed. During Pythium sp. prone weather, we use a fungicide-treated seed which costs an additional four cents a pound. This is very worth while during mid-summer establishment.

The first step of the overseeding operation is to broadcast two to three pounds of seed directly on the ground. We then core aerify four times with 5/8 inch tines. Between aerifications, additional seed is broadcast on the cores. Typically, we broadcast two pounds of seed five times for a total of ten pounds per thousand square feet. After the coring and seeding operations have been completed, the cores are shredded using a vertical mower. Next the area is hand raked or dragged several times with a fuerst rake. Divots, duff, and debris left over from the dragging operation are removed with a sweeper. Any heavily divot areas not completely filled with the soil from the aeration are then filled and topdressed with the soil mix. The soil topdressing is accomplished by hand using shovels and lutes. This assures that low areas are properly filled. Starter fertilizer is applied and the area is watered. Care must be taken not to damage the established turf that remains in the overseeded area.

After seven days the area is mowed at 3/4 of an inch. From seven to fourteen days the area is again mowed two to three times, again at 3/4 of an inch. After fourteen days mowing occurs four times weekly and the height of cut is reduced to 1/2 inch. After twenty-one days seeded areas are ready for play. I find that increasing the height of cut for two weeks hastens establishment and reduces the water use rate allowing a higher percentage of germination and establishment. Ryegrass with a low crown easily tolerates lowering the mowers 1/4 inch without the adverse affect of scalp. This seeding process is ongoing. Typically, we overseed within one week of rotating the tees.

There are a few problems associated with using ryegrass. Pythium sp. pressure is definitely increased and disease control should be carefully monitored. Ryegrass definitely need good drainage. Ryegrass does not do well under poorly drained conditions. During wet periods, the ryegrass growing directly over the drain tile appears much healthier.

I have had little success using preemergence herbicides in combination with intense aeration and seeding. Over the past few years we have switched to light, weekly applications of post emergent weedgrass herbicides. I have found acclaim to give adequate control without injuring the ryegrass at any stage of development.

Fertility levels need to be optimum. On a small tee, grass is being germinated and established in a very short time frame, simply to be removed as a divot, During the summer there is little, if any mature turf on our range tee. Juvenile plants usually require double the amount of nutrients.

I feel strongly that proper tee rotation is crucial in successfully managing a small tee. It takes communication and cooperation between the greens staff, the golf shop, and the membership.