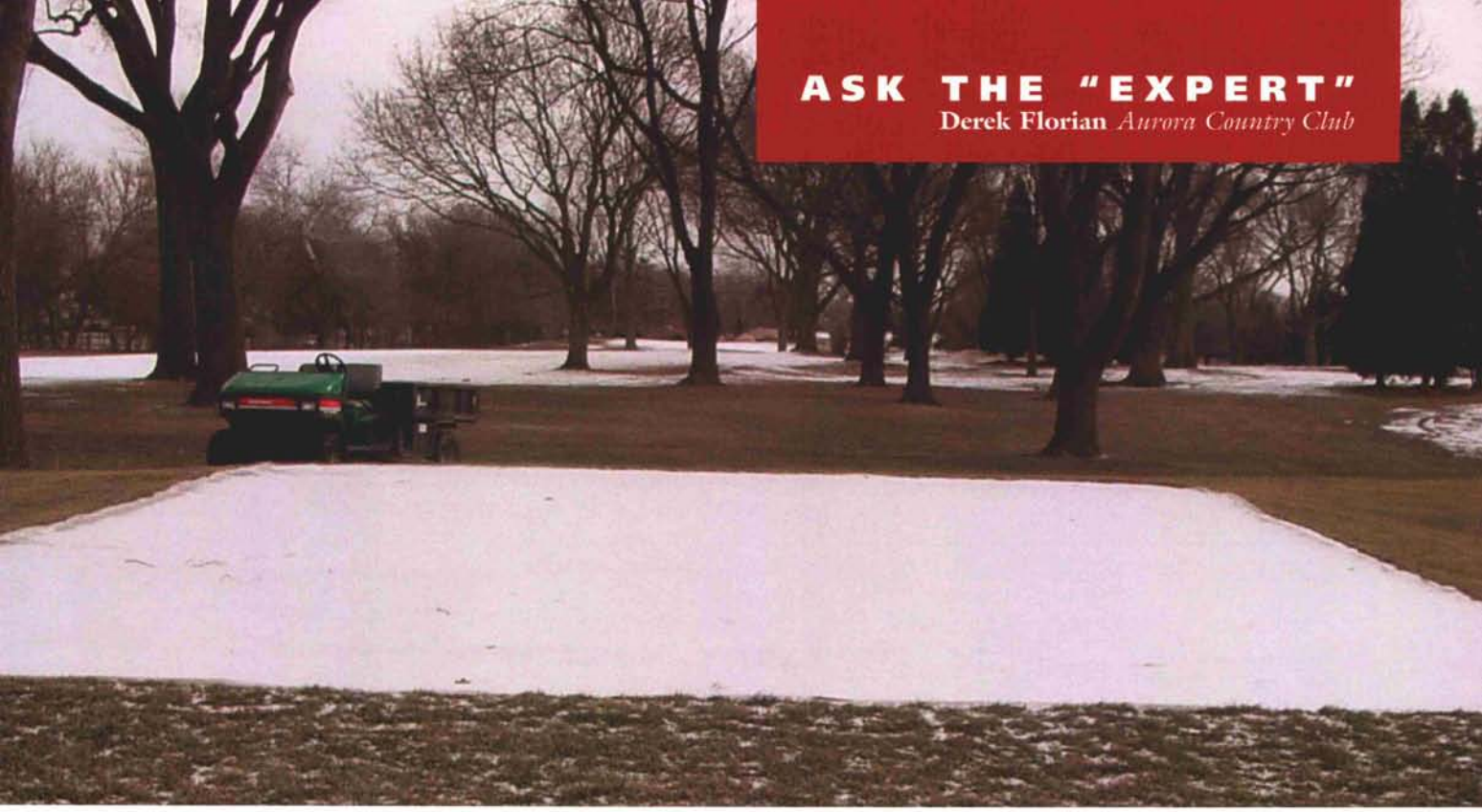


ASK THE "EXPERT"

Derek Florian *Aurora Country Club*

Golf's Great Cover-Up

As I sit in our shop and look outside while "Billy," my wonder boss, sits on a beach somewhere near the equator, I wonder how our turf and ornamentals will come out of winter with good color and overall plant health. So far this winter season, we have not received adequate snow cover, and our turfgrass has been exposed to extremely low temperatures. As superintendents, we have a very large tool belt to manage our golf courses. Sometimes a few of these tools fall to the bottom of this so-called tool belt, and we just forget they are there. Turf covers, erosion-control blankets and weed barriers are a few tools we can utilize to give our turfgrass and ornamentals a better environment in which to grow.

. . . you cannot just cover a surface and forget about it. You must monitor how much germination and growth you are receiving . . .

During last season, Aurora Country Club underwent a small renovation to our driving range, chipping area and second hole. As most of you know, the fall months of last season were not the best time to start a renovation. And if you don't remember, let me refresh your memory. September had to be the hottest September on record (in my opinion) with consistent days at 90° or above. So basically, in a nutshell, turfgrass would not grow. October was just a cold and wet month, and November was the beginning of winter for most of us. And yes, once again, turfgrass would not grow.

Even though we did get germination, the temperatures were falling and I didn't know what to do with our new seedlings. Since my boss Billy (John Gurke) wanted me to really get the full experience of a grow-in, he allowed me to make most of the agronomic decisions for this renovation. Not knowing what to do, I asked Billy if there was anything that I could do to protect this new turf from death. He told me to break out the Evergreen turf covers and cover all the newly seeded tees and chipping green. Since I had no previous experience with turf covers, I asked Billy if he would assist me with the installation. (See above picture.)

(continued on page 12)

The first recommendation I would make regarding turf cover installation is that you should pick a day where the wind is less than 10 miles per hour. This makes for a much easier installation. Turf covers are very large and, as I experienced for the first time, they take a great amount of manpower to install and remove. Using sod staples, and our bodies to hold down the covers from blowing away, John and I finished covering three tee surfaces in about two hours. So imagine covering 18 greens and a whole lot more tees—this would take forever. I can't neglect to mention the fact that you need to remove the covers during the fall months if temperatures fluctuate higher. No, you cannot just cover a surface and forget about it. You must monitor how much germination and growth you are receiving, or you can create a greenhouse-like effect underneath the cover and when you uncover your turf in the springtime, you may find three inches of long rough to mow on a tee box. During last season, we only had to uncover the tee surfaces twice: once because they were getting too long and required mowing, and once when we observed algae in areas where seedlings were not germinating (sure, it's green, but not the kind of green we were looking for), so we uncovered to dry out the surface, and applied some Daconil to remedy the algae.

What did I learn from the use of turf covers in a grow-in application? I learned that they can work if you have the manpower and time to manage them.

Last week (late January) I went out to visit the covered tees and chipping green to take some photos for this article. I tried to pull up on the sides of the covers, only to find out that the staples were frozen solid. Ripping up one corner, I was amazed at what I found underneath—beautiful green grass that looked to still be growing in subfreezing weather. What did I learn from the use of turf covers in a grow-in application? I learned that they can work if you have the manpower and time to manage them. If you are interested in using turf covers for the first time, perhaps consider covering your worst green on the course in the late fall, and see what type of results you get in the spring (keeping in mind that *Poa annua* likes it under there, too).

Another product we utilized during the renovation was Futera Blanket—an erosion-control product designed for application over newly-seeded areas to prevent soil erosion and to act as surface insulation to keep soil temperatures higher in the late fall months. It can also be a lower-cost option to sodding erosion-prone areas (i.e., green, tee and bunker perimeters). We discussed the option of using Futera Blankets on the entire renovation project—not just the areas where there could potentially be erosion. But due to the added cost, we opted not to use it on the entire renovation. Installation of Futera and other rolled erosion-control products is very simple—you just unroll it over the seedbed and attach it to the soil with either biodegradable landscape spikes or wire staples. A few weeks after seeding the roughs and fairway, we noticed the germination rates were far higher in the areas where we used Futera. I believe this product outperformed our expectations—we had a dense cover of weed-free turf where it was used (at about half the cost of sodding), with very sparse germination in uncovered areas. One negative aspect of Futera Blanket is the plastic mesh that holds the material together. Once you receive adequate germination and the turf is ready to mow, this plastic mesh can become caught up in the reels or blades of the mower, causing a difficult first cut. If Billy and I could change one decision regarding the renovation, it would have been to buy more Futera Blanket to apply to all seeded areas.

Weed barrier is a product that I had never used until this year. This product is a thin black fabric you apply over the top of the soil in a landscape bed to prevent weed encroachment. I tried this material out for the first time on a landscape side job over the summer. The advantages of this product include the fact that is does cut down on the amount of weeds that germinate in the bed; but I did find out that once you cover the material with mulch or even gravel, the weeds still germinate above the barrier. On another job, I tried using less mulch to cover up the fabric, but then I had problems with the material being pulled up and showing through. In theory, a barrier over the soil to deter weed germination and growth seems beneficial; but too many

problems can occur. For example, every time you wish to add another plant, or even remove plants, the barrier becomes an issue. The fabric rips and tears, almost making you want to remove all the material and start from scratch.

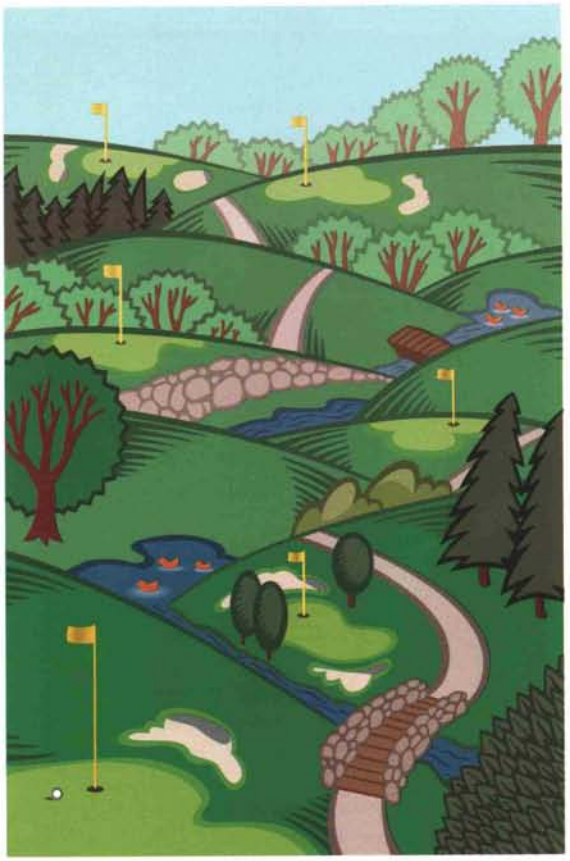
So here I am, peering out the window once again (while pondering visions of monsoons and hurricanes ruining Billy's vacation) and thinking of the warmer weather that will soon take residence in the Chicagoland area. Thankfully, it appears Mother Nature has finally graced us with her own version of a turf cover (SNOW), probably only temporarily given the peculiarities of this winter.

However, when snow cover is not in the hand dealt to us by Mother Nature, there are many different manufacturers of turf covers, erosion blankets and weed barriers with their own brand names and proclaimed differences to serve an equal purpose. In my own opinion, turf covers are tools we all should reconsider using to combat the type of winter weather we have received over the last few years. Erosion-control blankets are one of the best tools we have as superintendents during a grow-in situation, and should be utilized as extensively as our budgets permit. Weed barrier and other weed-inhibitor products, on the other hand, have their place in the homeowner market, but from a golf course perspective—where the resources for intensive landscape bed maintenance can be lacking—are best left on the shelf at your local home improvement store, and not in your "tool belt" at all.

. . . turf covers are tools we all should reconsider using to combat the type of winter weather we have received over the last few years. Erosion-control blankets are one of the best tools we have as superintendents during a grow-in situation, and should be utilized as extensively as our budgets permit.

Jon Jennings, CGCS *Chicago Golf Club*

Restoring Classic Golf Courses



Golf courses are living, breathing entities. From the very minute construction concludes, the golf course will never be the same again as it is that minute. Weather, equipment, as well as maintenance procedures change the look of a golf course, although gradually over time. Many features have been lost on classic golf courses for this very reason. More drastic changes occur when committees or golf course superintendents make a number of small alterations to the course. Following many decades of tinkering, the original playing characteristics are lost, sometimes forever.

Trees can have a major impact on how a golf course looks and plays. Even the most well-intended plantings can grow and become a hindrance to players and a detriment to quality turf with the tree robbing essential nutrients, light and water. Small trees that are clustered together in order to create a backdrop or screen an area from view or for protection will more than likely grow to become an unsafe and unsightly cluster requiring attention from future committees.

Some of the classic golf courses built during the early period of the 20th century were severely altered due to the Second World War.

The economy can be a major factor in the maintenance of a golf course. Some of the classic golf courses built during the early period of the 20th century were severely altered due to the Second World War. Labor was tight with some courses utilizing whatever labor was available. Club managers, waiters or local farmers were some of the people that assisted in maintaining the golf course while regular staff members were involved with the war effort.

Financially, clubs were struggling just to stay above water. Golf courses that had heavy mortgages were forced into relinquishing their property when they were unable to make payments. Other clubs made modifications to their maintenance procedures. Bunkers were filled in with soil and seeded or just grew over so they would no longer require raking. Greens were recontoured in order to reduce the amount of area that required mowing. Fairway area shrank, as did the frequency of mowing. Overall, golf courses really struggled to maintain the property in some resemblance to a golf course.

(continued on page 16)

After World War II, many technological advances were brought to the forefront of the golf maintenance industry. New chemicals became tools for turf managers to combat weeds, disease and insects. Equipment advances created greater efficiency, allowing crews to accomplish in one day what may have previously taken a week or more. Bunkers were now raked with mechanized equipment; greens had riding mowers and large lumbering fairway machines breezed up and down fairways providing a faster cut than ever before. Along with these advances came increased expectations placed upon the golf course superintendent to produce even better conditions.

Underground irrigation systems provided water to not only greens and tees, but also, for the first time, fairways were now lush throughout the dry summer months. In order to accommodate single-row irrigation water distribution patterns, once expansive fairways were narrowed to allow water coverage. Fairway bunkers in many instances appeared awkwardly placed outside of the landing areas. Trees were planted along the perimeter of the newly reduced fairway lines, creating tight corridors for players to navigate off the tee.

In 2001, the touring golf professionals increased their driving average by six yards. This was the largest single increase in driving length in a one-year period in more than a 15-year span. Golfers have at their access equipment that is on the cutting edge of technology. Players at all levels are better-conditioned today. Stretching and strength training have developed athletes that have the ability to hit the ball further and more accurately than during any other time in history. Bunkering that was effective a very short time ago is rendered obsolete with the golf ball traveling beyond intended landing zones.

Unfortunately, all of these aforementioned items quietly chisel away at the original architectural design of the golf course. One day, while reviewing old pictures of the Club, a committee realizes the golf course does not resemble the one that was designed 50 or more years ago. This is the pivotal decision-making point. While features are still somewhat intact, hopefully the Club will make the correct decision and hire a qualified golf course architect to guide the restoration work in order to bring the original course back to life as well as meet the expectations of the membership.

Many golf courses have begun this renaissance lately in order to return the course to a bygone era while providing modern standards of maintenance and the quality that has become expected in the area of turfgrass maintenance.

Skokie Country Club and Chicago Golf Club: Venerable Clubs With Rich Histories

Skokie Country Club in Glencoe is a Club with a storied past. Having hosted such events as the 1922 United States Open, 1983 United States Amateur Stroke Play and the 1998 United States Senior Amateur, Skokie has always been a championship golf course. Originally designed in 1904 by noted golf course architect Tom Bendelow, Skokie has been through a number of changes in the last 99 years. Renovations led by committees employing such architects as Donald Ross, William B. Langford, Theodore J. Moreau, Ken Killian, Dick Nugent and Rees Jones have changed the look that was originally designed

Initially, Donald Ross renovated Skokie in 1914, laying out many classic features. In 1938, Skokie sold part of its property on one side of the course and purchased more land on the other. This act necessitated the reconfiguration of the golf course. Langford and Moreau were enlisted to create eight new holes that would tie into the untouched 10 Ross holes. The Eighties were a period where Skokie wished to modernize the golf course for changes in the game that had occurred in the last couple of decades. Rees Jones repositioned bunkers, bringing them back into play and worked mounding for backdrops surrounding the green complexes.

Chicago Golf Club in Wheaton is the oldest 18-hole golf club in the country. Designed in 1893 by Charles Blair Macdonald, Chicago Golf Club opened for play in 1894. Golf was gaining popularity in the early 1900s with men and women taking to the sport as a way to enjoy the outdoors in a spirited game.

As with Skokie, Chicago Golf also hosted a number of events in the early part of the century, including the 1897 United States Open, 1897 United States Amateur, 1900 United States Open, 1903 Women's Amateur, 1905 United States Amateur, 1909 United States Amateur, 1911 United States Open, 1912 United States Amateur, 1928 Walker Cup Match and the 1979 United States Senior Amateur. The Walker Cup Matches will return to Chicago Golf August 13 and 14, 2005.

The idea of making substantial changes or improvements to the course dates back to 1913, when British designer H.S. Colt, who was in the Chicago area, was asked to review the course and make suggestions. He did so, and submitted a bill for $511.56. The only change made at that time was to build a mound to the left of the first fairway and about halfway to the green.

By 1917, the Club was ready to make a substantial renovation to the course. Nothing could be done of course until after the war, and it was early in 1921 before work was done in earnest.

Per the recommendation of C.B. Macdonald, Seth Raynor would be sent to the Club to design and oversee the renovation. Raynor visited the course in March of that year and spent several days going over the ground. The golf course, with the exception of holes 1, 17 and 18, was rerouted. Green complexes were rebuilt with classic Raynor features such as the Road Hole on no. 2, the Biarritz on 3, Alps 5, Short Hole 10, Punch Bowl 12, Eden 13 and Cape 14.

Chicago Golf's changes were very subtle. Following the renovation in 1922 up until today, no major reno-

vation had occurred. Through the aforementioned natural progressions, the course has changed from what it once was. The war changed many features on the golf course. Greens were reduced in size so they would be more manageable to maintain. Some bunkers deemed unnecessary were filled in and as Dutch Elm Disease devastated once stately elm trees on the property, other trees were added not only for replacement, but to act as backdrops and force players to alter shots.

Overall, the golf course is as close to untouched as you will find on an 81-year-old layout. Green committees and continuity of golf course superintendents have worked in the favor of preservation. However, the accumulation of many years of subtle changes added up to where action needed to be taken to return the luster that was created by Seth Raynor.

Skokie's Road to Restoration

By the late Nineties, Skokie realized that many changes to the golf course had been made not only through architecture, but by the way the course had been maintained. Reviewing numerous pictures that were taken of the course following the Ross renovation, the Club realized many things had changed, particularly the green size and bunkers.

Skokie began the restoration process late in the summer of 1998. The first step was to reclaim lost green area. Many greens had shrunk in size during World War II and from years of mowing with triplexes. The front areas of the greens were recaptured first. The turf being mowed at a lower height did not present as great of a challenge in order to achieve green height as the rough areas in the back sections of the greens.

The large-scale renovation was approved in the early part of 1999 when golf course architect Ron Prichard was hired to oversee the project. A turf nursery was created in 1999 from aerification plugs with L93 bentgrass mixed with the plugs in order to create turf that would blend with the existing greens. The nursery had a drainage system with six inches of greens mix on it encompassing an area of 18,000 square feet. Aerification was scheduled early that year. That way plugs could be collected from the greens and the nursery would be able to establish before the onset of winter.

The plan was to commence with the project while having as little impact upon golfers as possible. Fifteen holes would be open when three were closed. The first couple of weeks, activity was confined to holes 5 and 11 while they were being rebuilt. Following the rebuilding of these greens, routing became more of a challenge to get players around the course so they were still able to play 15 holes. As play dropped off, activity increased to where in the late fall of 2000, only nine holes were open.

The bunker project began in August of 2000. Wadsworth Construction was hired as the contractor to rebuild two greens and all of the bunkers, as well as level and square off the tee surfaces. Fairway contouring was performed with the assistance of Huber Ranch Sod Nursery, reinstituting contours based upon a 1922 lithograph. All of the bunkers would be rebuilt on the golf course, entailing reshaping, new drainage and new sand. Initial preparation for the project began with spraying the turf surrounding the bunkers with Round Up two weeks prior to the construction date. The reason for this: old turf would be rototilled into the topsoil, saving the labor of having to strip it off the banks. The sand selected initially was one that the Club had used previously. Thelens sand did not meet the USGA specifications for bunker sand. However, prior experience offered the knowledge that it was much firmer as well as being the sand that had been used in the bunkers for

(continued on page 19)

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years. After the first 19 bunkers were completed, it was observed that some would retain water for as much as three-quarters of the day. This was unacceptable for new construction with sufficient drainage systems installed.

The committee was contacted, informing them of the situation. They began to recheck the sand. Clay pots were set up with a gravel base and the bunker sand placed on top of it. The Thelens sand and Meyers FA9 were compared. The testing showed the Thelens sand was very slow to drain and became increasingly slower during the week. The other sand maintained consistent drainage. After the test, both sands were set up in a bunker side by side for evaluation by the committee. The sand was looked at both wet and dry while players hit shots out of both to determine which sand they would prefer. Although it was a little soft, the FA9 sand was selected. The sand in the 19 bunkers was changed to the newly selected sand before construction resumed on the rest of the course.

The bunkers went from being flashed and relatively shapeless to more of a traditional look with steep grass banks. The sod was a blend of bluegrass and fescue. Near the end of the project in 2000, the weather turned cold quickly. Realizing that winter would soon be setting in, four truck loads of sod were ordered. The order was cut and kept in cold storage at H&E Sod. Unfortunately, when it was delivered, the sod was frozen solid. In order to thaw the sod, it was brought into the heated area of the maintenance facility. Once thawed, it was transported to the remaining bunker banks and laid on frozen ground. Surprisingly, when spring arrived, the sod established amazingly well.

Along with the bunkers, the no. 5 and 11 greens were rebuilt. All of the sod was removed so it could be utilized in the green expansions. Both of these greens had been previously rebuilt. The earlier rebuild of the no. 5 green resulted in a putting surface with limited hole locations. The no. 11 green had been rebuilt in 1991. Aside from having limited hole locations, the green pitched away from incoming shots. The Skokie membership was constantly frustrated with the shot-holding ability of the two putting surfaces.

Fairways that had become straight and lifeless were also restored utilizing old pictures. Once the original fairway lines were established, Huber Ranch Sod Nursery was contracted to bring equipment that would be able to strip the bluegrass quickly and lay bentgrass in the expanded fairway areas.

(continued on page 21)

Says . . .

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