

Bentgrass: Have We Created A Monster

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WHAT have we superintendents in South Florida done to ourselves?

Why do we let less than five percent of our members dictate our course of action even though it may not be agronomically sound?

Why do we overseed anyway?

Why do we use bentgrass?

These are a few of the questions I ask myself every year around overseeding time. Sure, a good overseeded bermuda green is beautiful and plays great, but at what cost?

Don't misunderstand what I'm saying here. I can understand the need for overseeding in central and north Florida and other parts of the South; places where frost occurs regularly during the winter months.

But here in South Florida frost is rare. Even in an unusually cold winter the maximum amount of time that bermuda might be dormant is about 30 days, and that is really stretching it. What is the worst we can expect to happen on those 30 days?

The amount of wear on the putting surface is going to increase and the color won't be so great. More important is the

speed of the green. It's going to increase but not to a great extent; because, let's keep in mind, those 30 days aren't going to be back-to-back. A cold snap might last a couple of days and then there will be a few warm days and nights. The greens will have time to recover their health and stamina.

Now compare that to the amount of time that play is difficult due to overseeding. First you have two weeks to a month of slow greens prior to establishment after overseeding. And that's provided that nature is cooperative, which she seldom is.

Last year many superintendents in our area had to oversee twice due to an extremely warm November and December. The bentgrass was dying from the vigorous growth of the bermuda which never went dormant. And of course there is always the torrential down-pour that occurs just after you've finished overseeding, leaving the bentgrass in puddles that dot the greens.

Now take into consideration the two to four weeks of transition from bent to bermuda. You've lost a lot more quality playing time overseeding than you have without overseeding.

Who cares? you say. Your members aren't here during the growing in and transition stages.

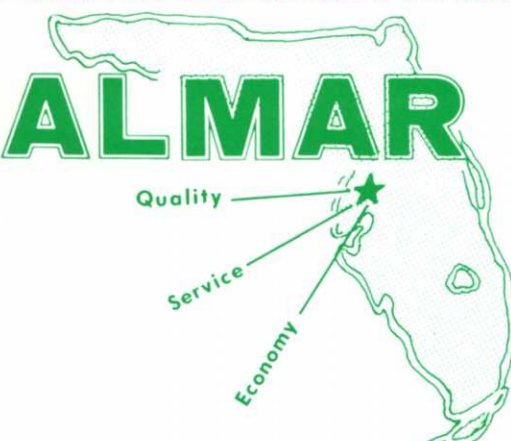
Not true. Every year our winter guests are coming earlier and staying later. Many of them come and spend several weeks in the summer and many more are making Florida their permanent year-round residence. These people feel like second-class citizens because they have to suffer through poor playing conditions due to overseeding.

Still none of this takes into consideration the money spent on seed, chemicals and labor. Not to mention that a green that shares its growing space with two different types of turf isn't going to be as healthy as the green that only has to support one turf type.

I have been overseeding with bent and saber over the past seven years and have had excellent putting surfaces for five of those seven years. I feel certain that I could have achieved the same results without overseeding.

Toward that end I would like to see all the superintendents in Southern Florida go back to one grass year-round. I think that in our quest for excellence we may have created a monster in the form of overseeding. ■

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