



Successful Transition from Overseeding takes...

Planning, Preparation, Patience

After the disaster of El Nino last year, I think the topic of transition made a few people gun shy about contributing on this subject, but I managed to find a few brave souls who offered some comments about what they hope to achieve during the 1999 transition phase of overseeding management.

I found some common threads running through their comments: Planning was one, with grass variety selection being a key ingredient at the Grand Cypress and Celebration Golf Clubs followed by booking maintenance schedules a year in advance.

Preparation was next and that covers everything from having healthy turf in the fall going into overseeding to managing cultural practices in the spring.

And last but not least, patience! Patience in dealing with changing growing conditions... in letting your turf cover dictate the timing of some of your practices... in taking into account that with these persistent new grass varieties, maybe we should be calling it "summer transition" instead of spring transition.

Given normal conditions, it's relatively easy to grow turf in the dead of winter and the dead of summer.

But when the sun crosses the equator twice a year and the seasons begin to change, Florida superintendents are asked to maintain good playing condi-

tions while growing two or three different types of grasses at the same time. That's when patience by superintendents and golfers alike pays off.

JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

little more seed here and there, babied it a little bit and we always got there.

"Last year we never made it and we had a rough winter. I've never had so much explaining to do about course conditions to company officials and the pro shop for the guests in my entire 15 years.

"That experience made me realize that you'd better have a sense of urgency about getting the overseed established before the heavy play season starts. We are a resort and driven by our seasonal play. Guests arriving from up North for some high-priced winter golf don't care if you just had 40 inches of rain in 60 days, and they don't want explanations either.

"I will say this and then we can move on: My management team is pretty well educated about the

business. They trust me and they play a lot of golf at other places. They knew we weren't the only place having some problems. I used the reports from the USGA and from Dr. Elliott to give them the scientific agronomic reasons we were struggling with thin turf.

"January was the worst of it because we had to have tournament conditions in place for the LPGA HealthSouth event. We wore the place out. After that we started to slowly improve. Like I said, I thought we were bullet proof!

"Hello!"

Learning those tough lessons from El Nino, Alex is going to try a couple of things to ease the management of his



Grand Cypress superintendent Tom Alex shows the two different ryegrasses used in the seed blend applied to the rough. The larger "intermediate rye" plant on the right should transition quicker in the spring, giving the bermudagrass a better chance to fill in. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Tough Lessons Generate Some New Ideas

Tom Alex has been the superintendent/manager/director of golf course maintenance at the Grand Cypress Golf Club for the past 15 years. Known for the excellent conditioning of his golf courses, Alex admitted that last year's overseeding season was a real eye opener. It's difficult not to frame some of the practices we use in relation to what happened during El Nino last year.

"Going into last year, I always thought we were bulletproof," he said. "We have the resources and the talent to respond to unusual conditions. We always dusted a

overseeding from establishment to transition.

"Our biggest problem areas have always been our roughs," he said. The short-cut areas like greens, tees, and fairways do well under normal circumstances: as the weather warms up, the host bermudagrass does its thing and the overseeding dies out.

"But in the roughs with the taller heights of cut, the high traffic areas often require sod replacement. This year we're going to try a ryegrass blend in the roughs that is 50 percent perennial and 50 percent intermediate rye. The intermediate rye has characteristics similar to annual rye and we hope it will start checking out a little sooner to allow the bermudagrass to get more sunlight and warmth in the spring.

"On the greens we are going to continue a practice that worked well for us last year. In the past we had always renovated the greens aggressively beginning in mid-May when our greens fee rates went down. We would pull cores, verticut, clean up, top dress and drag.

"Some years that was OK... if it was a cool spring. But if it was real hot and dry we could end up wiping out all the *Poa triv.* When the *Poa* goes, it goes quick.

"Last year in May we just deep solid-tined the greens with the Verti-Drain and then rolled them. The deep tining gave the bermudagrass roots and chance to develop and we didn't damage the overseeding on top.

"We ran our fungicide program a little longer which helped the bentgrass in our mix. The *Poa triv* melted out naturally with the onset of warmer weather. With rain and washing last year, and all the extra

seed we put down, we had quite a few thin areas we thought we would have to sod, but we only had two small areas we had to do. So we're going to try that process again this year."

Speaking of sodding, former years of wall-to-wall overseeding had led to a lot of resodding the roughs at Grand Cypress. The caravans of sod trucks going into the property were almost legendary. Alex has developed a strategy for dealing with transition in the rough.

"Around Easter we start lowering the rough cut down to one inch. That doesn't scalp or hurt the bermudagrass too much and reduces the rye canopy to allow sunlight and heat to help any bermudagrass that's there.

"In mid-May, with the reduction in greens fees, we double verticut the fairways and aerify the fairways and roughs. We apply a 1:0:1 fertilizer like a 15-0-15 with 50 percent slow-release nitrogen. Then we get in a truckload of ammonium sulfate and begin to scout and spot-fertilize the rough areas we think we can grow back in during transition."

"This is decision-making time. When the temperatures start to go up, we closely watch the dew patterns in the roughs. Lots of dew means lots of bermudagrass. In places where we have 50 percent dew, we will spot-fertilize weekly like a grow-in situation to bring them back.

"In the areas where we aren't seeing any dew patterns in the rye, we will start resodding. Those areas are usually the cartpath-to-fairway, high-traffic areas. If you don't see any bermudagrass down in there in April, you sure won't have any

in late May or June when a hot spell takes out the rye.

"We start the sodding process even with a good rye cover to avoid having to do it all at once in an emergency situation. This way we can do a truck or two at a time. We don't burn out the crew laying sod and we can manage and establish the new sod more easily."

In the area of weed control, Alex has a different approach from most. He has eliminated the spring preemergent application, and relies on a vigilant and persistent post-emergent spot-treatment program.

"Our spray techs will go through the courses weekly with a range of products usually Illoxan, MSMA, Basagran or 2,4, D. They scout and spot-treat only the problem areas. In the fall, we do pre-emerge with Kerb on the fairways and Surflan in the fairway bunkers, pine straw areas and ornamental beds. Any seed that gets into the greens bunkers is mechanically removed.

"We treat the fairways with Kerb for *Poa annua* control 60 days before overseeding. We don't charcoal them. Actually we have gotten the lead time down to 45 days before seeding with no adverse effects. I did an experiment a few years ago to check the interval. We applied some Kerb and then came back and seeded some rye from two to five weeks after the Kerb application. Germination seemed to be OK after three weeks.

"My intention on the fairways is just to control the overall population of *Poa annua*. Will we have some? Yes, but it won't get away from us. It is a livable

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threshold and we are being cost effective? While our post-emerge chemical costs are up some, the overall result by eliminating one preemergent application has saved us maybe 25-30 percent in chemical costs."

Summing up the topic, Alex said, "Dwight Kummer at Bay Hill put it best when he said, 'Think about all the practices we do when we have normal conditions. We can get by. But when conditions go sour and we try to maintain the same practices, we can have major failures.'

"That shows you how close to the edge we keep everything all the time. Two weeks of low sunlight and heavy play and all of a sudden you're in trouble. Last year kind of drove that nail home to me.

"Listen guys! Pay attention! I mean it's what we have to do. It's our business, but when the weather gets bad you'd better respond. Raise the heights of cut. Punch some holes. Watch your fungicide levels and keep those pin locations moving."

After a two-hour interview and ride around the course a final comment from as only Tommy can put it, "Are we done? You should get a paragraph out of that!"

Editors Note: The Grand Cypress Golf Club will be one of the stops on the GCSAA Turfgrass Tour during the conference and show in February 1999.

Poa Triv Plays Well, Exits Gracefully at Celebration

John De Matteo has been the superintendent at the new Disney Celebration Golf Club since it opened in April,



Superintendent John De Matteo checks the progress of the Poa triv germination in a fairway at the Celebration Golf Club. This is the third year in a row that De Matteo has seeded his fairways with Poa trivialis. Photo by Joel Jackson.

1996. Prior to that John was a regional superintendent for American Golf, responsible for eight courses in New York. John also spent eight years working as a technical representative for Loft Seed, Inc.

De Matteo has a different approach to overseeding than most, which helps set up his transition program.

"When we opened in 1996 we didn't want to have a lot of competition with the new bermudagrass, so we overseeded the entire course with *Poa trivialis*. We have

since modified our practices to use perennial ryegrass in the roughs to give better definition and contrast to the fairways which are still 100 percent *Poa trivialis*.

"I am also using ryegrass on the tees for better wear tolerance. The greens are still 100 percent *Poa trivialis*.

"There several reasons we still use *Poa trivialis* on the fairways.

"First and foremost is the way it transitions once the weather warms up. As the bermudagrass gets stronger with the heat, the *Poa trivialis* melts out, providing less

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Serendipity With Street Sweeper Helps Cut Grain Off Fairway

Isn't it funny how the tricks of the trade are sometimes discovered by accident? This is certainly the case with a technique that we utilize at Olde Florida to help reduce the quantity of grain and puffiness that can occur in our bermudagrass fairways.

While I was employed as an assistant golf course superintendent at the Loxahatchee Club in Jupiter, superintendent (at that time) Phil Shoemaker utilized a Model RHFA "Sweepster" 3-point-mounted sweeper to help clean up debris in fairways after core aeration.

The 6-foot wide, poly/steel brush normally used on roads or parking lots did a great job of breaking up the aeration cores and working the soil into the turfgrass. The organic debris that remained would be wind rowed to the side of the fairway with a blower and picked up later by a Toro Rake-o-Vac.

During the process of cleaning up the turfgrass we discovered that the broom would stand the turf up significantly when the broom rotated against the grain. After mowing the fairway, we then discovered that grain in these areas of the fairway was significantly reduced.

Upon accepting my current position, I also purchased a Sweepster broom for the same purpose of cleaning up after cultural

practices. However, we have taken this process a step further and incorporated the tool in to our grain-control program. In fact, the Sweepster broom does such a good job, the turfgrass in the fairways does not require any additional maintenance practices to reduce the grain. Consequently, with enough core aeration to reduce thatch, aggressive vertical mowing has all but been eliminated on our fairways.



Making one-way passes down a fairway against the grain, a tractor-mounted, street-sweeper broom, above, stands the turf up and then double-cutting the fairways, below, mows off the grain, producing good lies on upright grass



To perform the cultural practice of sweeping the fairways, the unit is installed on the back of our John Deere 5200 tractor. When the operator initially reaches the fairway they will scrape their hand or foot across the fairway to determine the domi-

nant direction of the grain. The broom is then engaged and travels against the grain, standing up the grain and/or stolons.

Since the grain on a fairway primarily grows the same direction, the tractor is backed up to the originating side of the fairway, staying off the turf that has already been broomed, and makes the next pass immediately adjacent to the previous pass. The operator continues this process of sweeping the turf in one direction until the entire fairway is complete.

After the tractor operator has a few rows completed another operator cuts the "standing up" turfgrass with a fairway mower in the same direction the broom traveled, thus "cutting off the grain." After completing each pass, the operator mows the same area a second time in the opposite direction.

When complete, every inch of the fairway has been mowed twice, the first time against the grain and the second with the grain, primarily to give the turfgrass a cleaner appearance.

We have found this process to be a win/win situation. The golfers enjoy the better lie their ball receives as the turfgrass has a more upright growth pattern and the turfgrass is easier to mow and we endure less scalping from puffy turfgrass.

Since the process is less disruptive to the turfgrass we have found the practice can be done numerous times of the year even in higher play months of spring and fall.

competition than some of the perennial ryegrasses.

"Second, the *Poa trivialis* gives a great playing surface — almost like a northern bentgrass fairway.

"Third, the small seed nestles down into the 419 bermudagrass during overseeding and reduces the chance of washing away if we get rains during establishment.

"Fourth, since it is a low-growing, fine-bladed variety, it is easy to mow and clean up fairways if you haven't been able to mow fairways due to bad weather. You know how thick ryegrass can get when you can't get to it!

"The *Poa trivialis* is seeded into the fairways at a rate of 90 pounds per acre. We don't do any special seedbed preparation. We keep our cut at .5 inch before and after seeding. It usually takes about two weeks longer for the seed to show up in the fairways than the greens. The Tifdwarf collars around the greens were a different story. We did verticut them twice with a Mat-A-Way, once this summer and again

in September before seeding on Nov. 2 this year."

So like Tom Alex, John is utilizing a grass-variety selection to help his transition in the spring. Having worked with Loft Seed, John believes in actively growing all the grasses on the course and letting nature take its course. While things can be done to encourage the bermudagrass, De Matteo says superintendents shouldn't resort to drastic measures like holding back the irrigation, or scalping the turf, or getting nitrogen rates too high.

"If superintendents want to play with the irrigation," he said, "they can maybe do more deep irrigation and reduce frequency, but you don't want to reduce the overall moisture. While trying to stress and thin the overseeding, you are also making the reemerging bermudagrass weak.

"I don't change the height of cut until our greens fee rates go down in May. Then I raise the height of cut to take the pressure off the bermudagrass. The warming weather will take out the *Poa trivialis*. How-

ever, we will lower the height of cut in the roughs to open up the ryegrass to allow more light to get to the bermudagrass.

"I do increase my nitrogen levels when the nights are consistently in the 60-degree range. I apply straight ammonium sulfate at .5 pounds per month for a couple of months when the bermudagrass shows signs of moving. At this time we also start slicing fairways and increase our normal winter spiking frequency on the greens to at least two times per week."

I asked De Matteo how El Nino affected his program last year.

"We were very fortunate last year," he said. "We had our seed down and up before the rains hit, so we got lucky on the front end. In the spring, I noticed the *Poa triv* hanging in longer because of the dry, cool nights that ran into May. The lower humidity actually helped all the cool-season grasses persist.

"In fact, when I worked in California, we had a heck of a time with transitions with the cool, dry weather out there. People

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don't realize how much transition is due to mild disease pressure that also helps to thin out the overseeding during humid weather. Last spring I was seeing substantial overseeding on the greens into June until the temperatures sky rocketed."

De Matteo hasn't seen the need for any preemergent weed control so far on the young course.

"If we develop some severe *Poa annua* areas, I would consider spraying them out and reseeding them since *Poa trivialis* will germinate at cooler temperatures than ryegrass. So far we just don't have a problem that warrants the time and expense."

Acknowledging the poor growing conditions that did befall the state last year, De Matteo said, "The best thing you can do for the turf is to raise the height of cut. In fact, my goal next year is to experiment with having good consistent greens without mowing them down to 1/8 of an inch or lower like we have done.

"In talking to our customers, I have heard them comment on how much they enjoy the course down the street. I know they aren't as manicured as we are, but they do have nice, thick turf on the greens. These golfers never mentioned the word 'speed.'

"When our greens fees go down in summer and we try to keep the greens on the edge, I don't think our customers really appreciate it. I'd much rather have good, consistent, healthy greens at that time of year without beating our heads against the wall."

Editor's Note: *The Celebration Golf Club and Community will also be one of the sites visited on the GCSAA Turfgrass Tour during the conference and show in February 1999. The Celebration Golf Club is managed by American Golf.*

You Can't Always Put Your Finger on What Happened

Spring transition is often an intangible process, and my results have ranged from, "When did it happen?" to "Why are the greens dirt?"

Fort Myers Country Club is a public golf course. Our greens fees go down in the spring and the number of players increases.

May is full of tournaments. This limits our ability to do any spring renovation.

What we try to do is have a seamless conversion from turf which is 80 percent perennial ryegrass and 20 percent *Poa trivialis* back to the host Tifdwarf bermudagrass. Through the winter we will spike weekly and lightly topdress every 2-3 weeks. We will start light verticutting on a weekly basis in March if the weather is warm.

Our height of cut for the season ranges from .175-.200 inches depending on the growing conditions. When we are pretty sure that the last cold front has passed through, we will lower our cut to .156 inch.

We don't change our fertility program except a slight increase to encourage the bermudagrass to cover thin areas more rapidly.

We attempt to control the emergence of volunteer ryegrass and *Poa annua* with a Barricade preemergent application in October. If we get some random germination around the first of the year, we will spray those areas with Kerb.

MIKE MONGOVEN, CGCS
Fort Myers Country Club

Transition Time Seems to Come Later and Later

It seems the transition time from overseeded turf back to bermudagrass has gotten longer and longer over the years. The new bentgrasses, *Poa trivialis* and ryes have become more heat tolerant and seem to want to stay around longer than I would like. Other than the normal slicing, spiking, light verticutting, lowering the cut and other usual cultural practices, we have found a few things that work well for us.

When Daylight Saving Time goes into effect in April, we start applying one pound of nitrogen per week to encourage the bermudagrass. This fertilizer push is a combination of quick- and slow-release granulars and liquid forms of nitrogen. These applications continue on both greens and tees until we aerate around the first of June.

We like to wait until we have about a 60-70 percent bermudagrass base showing through the overseeding so transition isn't too quick. We also use wetting agents to get us through warm and dry spring

periods when the transition is too rapid.

No matter how much we plan or what methods we use, Mother Nature has a lot to do with the success of all these practices.

JOE ONDO, CGCS
Winter Pines G.C.

Healthy Turf at Overseeding Makes Transition Easier

Transition starts before you drop the first seed. Healthy bermudagrass in October and November usually means healthy bermudagrass in June.

A lot of superintendents are dealing with tournaments through April, which can limit the start of any transition program. At Isleworth we start grooming in March to enhance our green speed, not to thin our overseeding. However, it must have some thinning effect. We begin light verticutting and topdressing every two weeks until we aerify in June. Other than spiking once a week, we do not get any more aggressive with cultural practices until aerifying in June. I have aerified in March and April, but the benefit is not worth the loss of valuable playing time.

Patience is the key. Maybe the term should be "Summer Transition." If I have overseeding on the greens through June and into July, I am probably having a pretty decent transition. I am not talking about a lot of *Poa trivialis* and bentgrass, but enough that you just keep seeing it here and there until it is finally gone around Independence Day.

Fertilizing is another tricky issue. The longer you can hold off without applying a pound of nitrogen with a dry product, the better. Although we use cool-season grasses as annuals, they are perennials and given the chance to "harden off," they will.

Often when you are trying to give the bermudagrass a jump start, you are also feeding a plant that is already a little stronger and just as intent on surviving. Of course, this tiny bit of wisdom is really relative to your seeding rate. If you have more bermudagrass than overseeding, then push when you are ready. If you don't have more bermudagrass, be careful.

BUCK BUCKNER
Isleworth Country Club