

# Spence's 'bunker wrap' saves edges, hastens germination

By MARK LESLIE

**B**ROOKLINE, Mass. — Employing the same theory as with putting green covers, Bill Spence has devised a "bunker wrap" that greatly protects bunker faces from desiccation while speeding up germination so the traps quickly return to play.

"We've been doing this for two years and have had great luck with it," said the superintendent at Country Club in Brookline, which will host the Ryder Cup competition, Sept. 24-26.

The "bunker wrap" is actually old Typar covers that have outlived their usefulness, or a geotextile fabric that can be bought in big rolls. "We cut them up to fit the bunker lips," Spence said, explaining that after the bunker is restored and the edging is seeded, the material is wrapped around the edging.

"We wrap as soon as we seed unless it's the middle of the summer and the wrap would cause heat-related problems," he said. "The warmer earth speeds up germination and rooting, and we get those bunkers in play very quickly. It stabilizes

those high bunker faces a little earlier. So early play is less prone to do damage if folks walk over the high edge."

A number of people who came to look at the bunkers couldn't believe Spence's crews had seeded them, he said.

He said that after sodding a number of bunker faces in 1984 and 1985, the sod began to decline in about five years. "The bunker faces are so steep," he said, "that we can't do what we need to do culturally to maintain sod over a long period of time. We couldn't aerify it, so the thatch built up and it inhibited root and air movement. So we had to redo those bunkers in a major way. Since then, whenever we can, we seed the bunkers."

He said he's using the "wrap" on new bunkers to promote old-looking growth, and on older bunkers to protect the grass (which is growing in sand) from desiccation.

"Most of the bunker lips — anything that is questionable — are covered," Spence said.

Members of The Country Club, a 27-hole layout that includes the venerable



Bill Spence's crews use Typar-like covers for the same purposes on bunker edges as they do on greens.

old Willie Campbell-designed 18, have paid particular attention to maintaining its character, Spence said. In keeping with this is a desire to retain the integrity of the bunkers.

When golf course architect Rees Jones came to Brookline in 1984 to restore it for the U.S. Open, he was "very cognizant of what had happened at Pebble Beach," where a bunker renovation made the course appear modern as opposed to the wind-blown Pebble of old, Spence said.

"Very often if you do major restoration work on an old bunker, you come out

with a bunker that doesn't resemble the one you started with," Spence said. "That old character is very, very hard to recreate once you undo it. It comes from years and years of wind and accumulated sand."

The "bunker wraps," he feels, help the rejuvenated edges grow into their old, wild look of the past.

All the bunker work of the past couple years has benefited The Country Club's grounds crew.

"We've gotten better at it as we've gone along," Spence said. "I've actually had a few architects call to ask how we did it."

Bill Spence photo

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