

Gearing up for spring: A task that bridges the seasons

By ANDREW OVERBECK

For superintendents in the Snow Belt, what is done in the fall is a direct result of how quickly courses will green up in the spring. Fall applications of snow mold fungicides, dormant seeding and fertilizers, top dressing and general course aerification occur in a narrow window of time and weather.

For Mike Kosak at Lahontan Golf Club in Truckee, Calif., preparations for the next spring start in mid-August just as Mother Nature begins to slow the turf down. In the Midwest and Northeast, however, a string of warm falls has pushed back preparations into mid-November and December.

A WARM, DRY FALL

"This is the third late arrival of winter," said Patty Knaggs, superintendent at Bass Rocks Golf Club in Gloucester, Mass. "We didn't close the greens until mid-December."

Dry conditions in the Midwest have hampered preparations. "We had to keep pushing back the snow mold applications and we set a record for no snow flurries in November," said Michael Bavier, superintendent at Inverness Golf Club in Pa-

latine, Ill. "I had to turn the water back on this year because we stayed so warm and dry so long."

However, not everyone is complaining about the Indian Summer conditions. Tom Leh, superintendent at Shepherd's Hollow in Clarkston, Mich., took advantage of the warm weather to grass-in 18 holes of the 27-hole Art Hills-designed layout.

"We had the seventh warmest November on record," said Leh. "We seeded a green on Nov. 1 and we've got grass on it. The course has greened up nicely."

The warm weather also means that it is tougher to keep the golfers off the course. "We used to aerify the greens right after Labor Day," said Wayne Otto, superintendent at Ozaukee Country Club in Mequon, Wis. "Now we do it the first week of November and the golfers want us to push it back to Christmas. But we obviously can't wait that long."

TO COVER, OR NOT TO COVER

Timing fall applications, however, is not the only tough call when it comes to bringing the golf course through the winter weather in good shape. Those who have a good amount of freezing and thawing throughout the winter and don't want

to have the hassle of taking turf covers on and off, use differing strategies to keep their courses in good form through winter.

Knaggs puts down an 80/20 sand/soil top-dressing mix on the greens that protects them from desiccation and temperature extremes. "The top dress smoothes out the greens, they green up faster and they are less susceptible to disease," said Knaggs.

Even along Lake Michigan, where high winds and desiccation are a danger, superintendent Paul Emling at Arcadia Bluffs Golf Club in Arcadia, Mich. has left his greens uncovered this winter.

"We covered the four greens by the water last winter," said Emling. "But the wind blew beach sand down through the cover and as it flapped around, the sand wore spots into the green because there was no snow on it."

This year Emling is leaving them uncovered and dealing with the consequences come spring. "I will probably have some desiccation," he said.

However, there are certain circumstances that call for covers. Leh has opted to cover his four newest greens to protect



To get Lahontan Golf Club to look like this each spring, superintendent Mike Kosak must keep an eye on the winter weather that dumps an average of 380 inches of snow on his course each year.

the young turf from the inevitable desiccation and to allow them more time to germinate. Otto uses covers on his practice tee to promote regrowth and on two of his greens. "One is a new green and the other one is in the shade. It's a no-brainer," said Otto.





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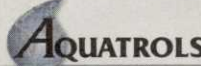
Continued on page 30

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Transition key to success in the S'West



The dramatic effect of winter overseeding gives way to conversion back to Bermudagrass in the spring here at Desert Highlands Country Club in Scottsdale, Ariz.

By DAVE WILBER

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Fairways in the Southwest depend on a successful springtime transition. On the outside, it may seem like a predictable event as warm temperatures of spring bring the weather in which Bermudagrass flourishes. Inside, however, the difficulties of transition are much more than they appear.

Phil Shoemaker, a certified golf course superintendent at Desert Highlands Golf Club here, knows transition all too well. The original grow-in superintendent at Desert Highlands, Shoemaker has recently returned to the club to take the helm.

"It begins with overseeding prep," Shoemaker said. "I fully believe that the days of verticutting down to the dirt are over. I dry down, scalp down and sweep with a large rotary broom."

By doing this, Shoemaker hopes to insure the return of the Bermudagrass in the spring.

Over the last five years, many courses that once were more concerned with their wintertime product now must deliver quality playing conditions year-round. The warm-season Bermuda must be given the chance to emerge from sleepy dormancy while the cool-season overseeding crop, which is just getting used to its life on earth, must be encouraged to die a predictable death. All of this must happen in such a way that golf continues as it should with happy private club members and resort/daily-fee customers who will return to the facility with their money clips at the ready. Sometimes the weather has different ideas.

The summer of 1999, while memorable for drought in the East and Mid-

Continued on next page

Spring

Continued from page 28

Belt superintendents have to stay on top of conditions throughout the winter. From breaking up ice layers to policing snow mold conditions there is plenty of on-course work to be done.

Kosak has to keep a close eye on the snow conditions.

"Our average annual snowfall is 380 inches," he said. "But

it can disappear at any point. One year we had six feet of snow just before Christmas and by New Years it was all gone."

My biggest concern is that the grass starts growing in the middle of winter and then the snow mold will absolutely kill you."

With that in mind, Kosak spends much of his fall ensuring that he has the grass as dormant as possible. "I shut

off the water and get the plant hardened off," he said.

Stephen Maas, superintendent at The Valley Club in Sun Valley, Idaho, uses old flags and pins to stay up to speed on snow depth. "The pins show us where the greens are and how many feet of snow we have," he said. "We take core samples

of the snow regularly to log the amount of snow that we have each day and keep an eye on ice layers and moisture and potential disease conditions."

Wind off Lake Michigan creates a constant source of work for Emling.

"It deposits more snow in the low-lying areas and takes it off

the high areas," said Emling. "We have tees and greens along the water that rarely have snow cover on them all winter long."

Last year Emling tried to use snow fences to keep the snow on the greens and had some success. "But it was a lot of maintenance," he said. "The wind kept snapping them right off."

WARM SOIL, WARM AIR

Come spring, course clean-up and getting the course dried out is the order of the day.

"There is nothing we can do because it is so wet," said Kosak. "In April we will blow off the remaining snow and let the course come out on its own." Then Kosak and his crew will verticut to get air moving through the crown of the plant.

Back in Massachusetts, aerification happens a bit earlier.

"Even though it's not always the agronomically correct time of the year, I usually do it when the high school is on spring break because that's when I have the labor staff," said Knaggs.

Clean-up is another arduous task.

Emling, again, must deal with whatever sand the wind has deposited on his course. "The wind pulls sand right off the beach and deposits it onto greens and tees," he said. "We have to go out there and skim the sand out of the bunkers and refill them and use a rotary broom to clean the sand off the greens and tees."

Maas also deals with a nasty spring-time surprise, voles that chew through the turf. Although Maas tries to control them, the damage is inevitable. "It takes a great deal of time to clean up in spring," said Maas. "We use spring harrows, a brush attachment and a hand rake to clean up the wet compacted runs."

With a new course coming into spring, Leh will be watching his course carefully. "We will get the irrigation system on as early as possible and aerify as soon as it dries out," he said. "I will only put pre-emergent herbicide on the mature turf, but none on the young stuff. We may have a grub problem and take-all patch, and we have to protect the young turf."

After a long cold winter, golfers are not the only ones who revel in the rebirth of the golf course.

"Once the frost goes, we make our first cut around the greens which is a lot of fun," said Bavier. "We get a chance to reshape the greens a bit."

Knaggs echoed those sentiments. "Come April 1 we are ready to come out of the blocks and concentrate on agronomics," she said. ▶



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