

# 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.

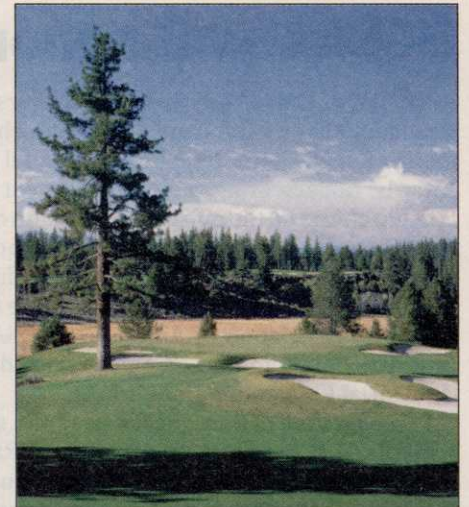
Knaggs puts down an 80/20 sand/soil top-dressing mix on the greens that protects them from desiccation and temperature extremes. "The top dress smoothes out the greens, they green up faster and they are less susceptible to disease," said Knaggs.

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.

## ICE, WIND AND SNOW

Despite rumors to the contrary, Snow

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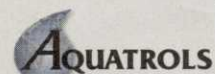


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## Transition key to success in the S'West



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-

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# Hibernation is out of the question for Snow Belt supers

By ANDREW OVERBECK

While the days are shorter and the temperatures colder, there is no shortage of golf course and non-golf course tasks to keep Snow Belt superintendents busy throughout the winter.

One look at the organizational chart that superintendent Stephen Maas uses to keep his winter jobs prioritized at the Valley Club in Sun Valley, Idaho, illustrates just how much work is left to do as the snow falls. "I use a timeline to outline the projects that need to get done before spring," he said.

From the usual indoor work such as repainting tee markers and servicing equipment to outdoor tasks such as monitoring snow depth and ice layers, Maas has

*'We collect all the trees that we have cut down over the year and deliver the firewood to the members.'*

— Michael Bavier

his hands full.

Maas also performs additional duties for club members during the winter time. At Christmas-time, Maas and his crew assist in the hanging of lights and decorations and one year even built an ice rink.

In addition to spending countless hours plowing snow and fixing equipment, Michael Bavier at Inverness Golf Club in Palatine, Ill., finds the time to spread the holiday cheer. "We collect all the trees that we have cut down over the year and deliver the firewood to the members," he said. "It keeps them happy and my crew busy."

Each year, Maas is also in charge of maintaining an outdoor platform tennis court. The sport is played in the winter in sub-freezing temperatures and is popular with hardy club members. "It is kind of a cross between ping-pong and tennis," said Maas. "It is a wooden court that is lit up and surrounded by a cage. The floor is heated and we are in charge of keeping the place clean and turning on the heaters."

Maas has also been involved in interesting agronomic projects during the winter. The Valley Club, which is located at 5,500 feet elevation, planted more than 9,000 pine trees on the property. During their first winter, Maas had to keep the reflecting sun from damaging and burning the young trees. "We had to go out and put down Milorganite on the south and southwest side of the trees in order to minimize the reflection," he said.

This winter, however, Maas plans to take it a little easier. Unless of course he actually goes forward with his idea of using a snow groomer to erect a physical barrier around the perimeter of the course to keep out the voles that burrow down into the turf during the winter.

"One year we tried it with skis, last year we used a snowmobile and this year we may just try the SnowCat. We'll see," said Maas.

# Rye/Bermudagrass transition

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west, is remembered by Southwestern superintendents in a much different light. A mild summer left warm-season grasses lagging behind. By September, as time arrived for the beginning of overseeding preparations, Bermuda fairways had gained precious little ground during the summer's mild temperatures.

As soon as perennial ryegrass began to be delivered, temperatures soared. Clubs and courses forced into early overseeding by hopes of pre-season golf in the stripes of ryegrass suddenly found themselves dropping cool-season seed and turning on water in perfect warm-season weather. The struggle to establish quality playing conditions will continue into much of the winter.

How does this affect conversion back to Bermuda?

"We'll probably have a really good transition," said Jim Janosik, a certified superintendent at LaQuinta (Calif.) Resort and Club. Janosik oversees the 36 holes inclusive of the Mountain and Dunes courses. While having a good transition is a good goal, Janosik, like all Southwestern superintendents, knows that he also needs a good crop of ryegrass for a good winter.

Shoemaker, a veteran of two Phoenix Opens while at the TPC of Scottsdale, explained: "Dense, lush ryegrass means for little Bermuda underneath at transition, but the better the ryegrass coverage the better it looks to everyone, so you have to walk a balance."

### DESERT SUPERINTENDENTS

The Southwestern desert superintendent must actively manage transition by steering into the skid as soil temperatures rise in the spring. This means not shutting off the water to rid the course of ryegrass. The perennial rye actually hardens off a good deal and gets stubborn when dry. At the same time, Bermudagrass that is just beginning to wake up needs soil moisture, so shutting off the water can sometimes lead to undesired effects.

Shoemaker likes to aerify and gives a tip: "Early aerification makes a big, big difference." He also believes that seeding rates kept around 500 pounds per acre, rather than the 700-pound rate, can provide a good winter ryegrass crop while helping in the spring with decreased competition during transition.

"I also like to get down on height of cut early and be less than .400 inch in early May on fairways," said Shoemaker. By taking as much shade off the Bermuda as possible, this technique helps a smoother conversion.

"We'll be as low as we can possibly go, in the .300-inch

range," agreed Janosik.

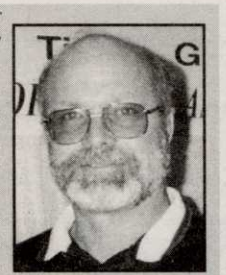
Southwestern superintendents who actively manage their spring transition by careful overseeding preparation, active weather watching, solid irrigation management and cultural practices timed to encourage warm-season grass development can become masters of conversion.

Many have found that each year brings a new and different set of circumstances that need to be counted as determining factors. Having great fairways for almost 12 months is not the result of just sitting back and watching the weather change. ▽

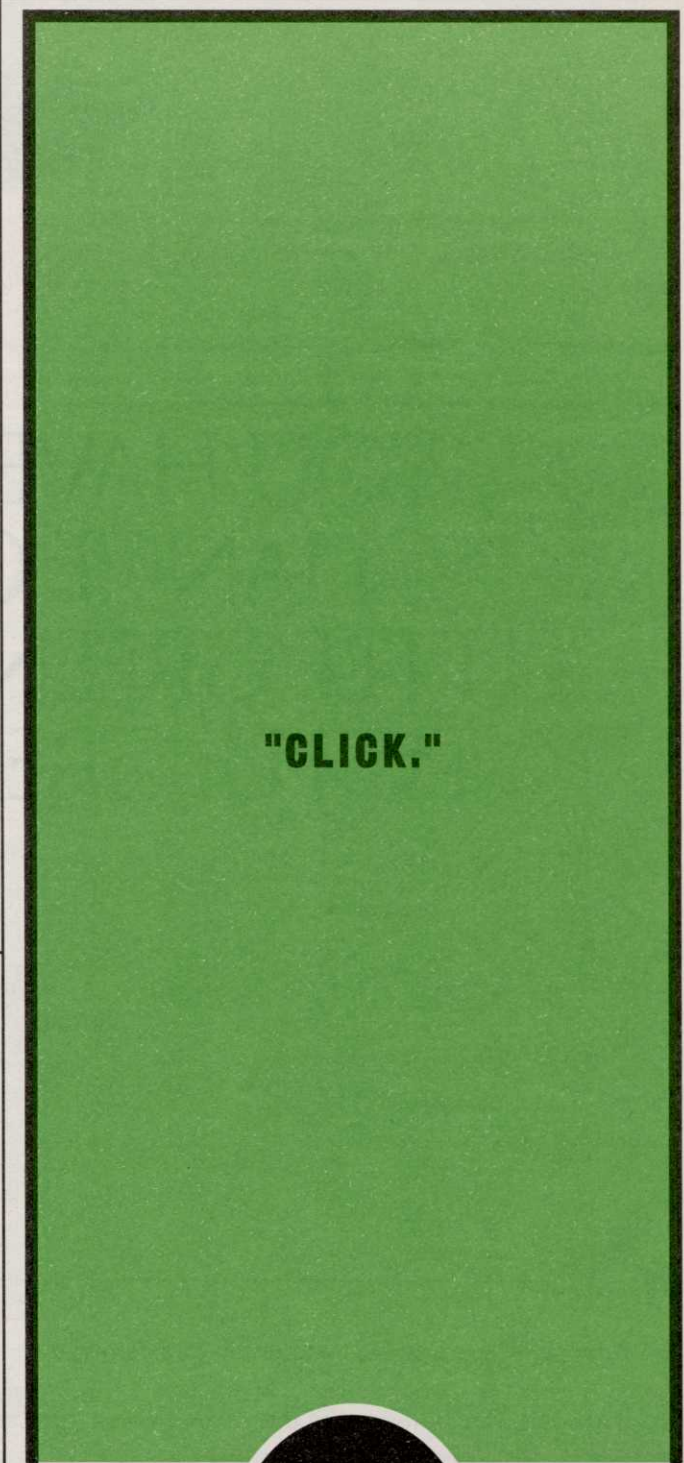
Dave Wilber is owner of Wilber Turf and Soil Services, an independent soil and agronomy consulting company. He services clubs and courses in the United States, the Caribbean and Scotland.



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