

The international way

Quent Baria, CGCS, at the Towson Golf & Country Club near Baltimore, took the road less traveled with his putting greens: the international route. Rather than California, push-up or USGA-spec greens, Baria tried a less-often-used method – the international green method – which he says brought greater benefits than conventional methods.

Baria took the superintendent position at the Geoffrey Cornish-designed, 35-year-old course in 2002. A year later, heavy rain – 32 inches in 58 days – spelled trouble for the greens, which had no drainage system.

“Eight greens were dead before Memorial Day,” Baria says, adding that putting surfaces at other holes seemed to be doomed as well.

Baria knew a change had to be made, but the club didn’t have the estimated \$1 million to rebuild the greens completely. Instead, Baria built on top of the existing greens, which cost about \$250,000.

The course closed in June 2003, and the project began. With help from Columbia, Md.-based Ed Beidel, a member of the ASGCA, and with the input from club committee members, design alterations in the

greens were addressed. Green configurations were adjusted to make existing bunkers more relative to play.

Surface contours were softened so the greens remained fair, yet challenging. This was necessary preparation for the faster green speeds achieved with the new generation bentgrasses, Baria says.

The first step of building on the greens was spreading sand over them. Harmon Turf Services of Hillsville, Va., then performed the on-site soil blending. Baria has heard many in the industry say on-site blending can’t produce quality, homogenous results, but that wasn’t the case.

“A uniform, six-inch cultivation depth was achieved,” he says.

The next step is what gives the international green method its name. The crew used a BLECovater, which, coupled with the method of using it, is from the U.K. The machine cuts channels to a 10-inch depth on 10-inch centers at width of about three-quarters of an inch. The channels can be filled with rice-size gravel.

“This creates negative hydraulic conductivity to move water into the profile,” Baria says.

The greens were then covered for methyl bromide gassing. This cost



A BLECovater cuts channels to a 10-inch depth on 10-inch centers.
Photo: Quent Baria



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about 20 cents per foot.

Three different organic fertilizers were used to rapidly rebuild the essential microbial population for plant growth. An inorganic starter and gypsum also were applied.

Penn A-1 bentgrass sod, obtained at \$1 per foot, was installed. When the process was complete, Towson had functional greens for about \$2 per square foot. The course opened for play Aug. 26, less than three months after the project began.

Four years after the greens reopened, Baria continues to experience desired performance from his greens. The channels pull in and hold water, which means Baria doesn't see as many instances of localized dry spot as he did with the old greens. They also seem to recover quickly from other afflictions.

"After a freeze, our greens are ready three to five days before the others in the area," Baria says.

The greens stand up well to the stress that comes with 23,000 to 24,000 rounds per year, he adds. The second year after the greens were installed, there were only six to 10 days where they needed to be hand-watered. They continue to require few days of hand-watering and less maintenance than courses with more conventional greens-building methods, Baria says. — HW



Quent Baria, CGCS, renovated the putting greens at Towson Golf & Country Club using the international method, which cost about \$2 per square foot. Photo: Heather Wood

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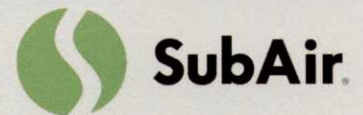
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