



WALL TO WALL

RENOVATION TEAM PLANTS PASPALUM ON ENTIRE COURSE IN FLORIDA

BY PETER BLAIS

One size fits all. The idea worked for adjustable baseball caps on human heads. Now it might be the same for seashore paspalum on Southern golf courses.

The Eagle Course at The Oaks, which was renovated by Arthur Hills recently and opened April 23 in Osprey, Fla., is reportedly the first course in the country planted entirely in Sealsle Supreme paspalum.

“My understanding is that SeaIsle Supreme is planted in certain areas on some courses, but not wall to wall,” says Brian Yoder, the Arthur Hills/Steve Forrest and Associates partner directing The Oaks project. “This should be the first one out of the block, and it will help the club differentiate itself from its competition.”

PASPALUM ON THE RISE

Hills/Forrest counts roughly 30 southwest Florida courses to its credit and firmly believes paspalum will supplant bermudagrass as the area’s turf of choice in the coming years, Yoder says.

The biggest advantage is paspalum’s ability to thrive with a salt-laden water supply. Salt is a major part of effluent and brackish water that many Sunbelt courses are turning to, as potable water becomes increasingly scarce in the rapidly developing South.



Sealsle Supreme paspalum grows much better with a less-than-perfect water supply, says Earl McMinn. Photo: The Oaks

The turf's proponents claim paspalum requires less water, fewer nutrients and a reduced number of certain pesticides. Compared to bermudagrass, it often has a deeper green color and denser plant structure that allows the ball to sit up higher. It also stripes well when mowed.

Until recently, paspalums have been considered mainly a tee, fairway and rough grass, with ultradwarf bermudagrass still king when it comes to greens. But some recently developed paspalum cultivars, like SeaIsle Supreme and SeaDwarf, have proven to be the equal of ultradwarfs when it comes to quality putting surfaces. That has led certain courses, such as The Oaks, to consider planting paspalum wall to wall.

A COMPLETE OVERHAUL

Earl McMinn, CGCS, came to work at The Oaks – which has two 18-hole layouts, The Eagle and The Heron – as director of golf and grounds maintenance in May 2004. McMinn previously worked at The Landings Club in Savannah, Ga., where he oversaw renovations of the

Marshwood and Magnolia courses.

When he arrived, The Oaks' members were debating the extent of needed renovations to The Eagle. The course was in dire need of irrigation and drainage improvements.

“My opinion was that as long as they were tearing up the course and spending \$2 million anyway, they could spend another \$2 million and do an entire renovation complete with USGA-spec greens and new grass,” McMinn says. “We had a lot of off-type bermudas that had gotten into the Tifdwarf 419 bermudagrass, so it wasn't a pure stand of 419 anyway. We also had some common bermudagrass and torpedograss, which is difficult to eradicate.”

The members voted overwhelmingly to follow his recommendation. McMinn and Yoder put the project out to bid in 2005 and closed The Eagle in March 2006.

PREPPING FOR PLANTING

McMinn traveled to several golf facilities that had

switched from bermudagrass to paspalum and asked about their eradication programs. Some had used methyl bromide and others preferred Roundup, but McMinn decided to blend the two processes.

He sprayed the entire course with Roundup before overseeding with ryegrass in the fall of 2005. Then he increased the overseeding rates to encourage a thick stand of ryegrass that would smother any of the remaining bermudagrass or torpedograss. Once the course closed the following spring, he applied two more Roundup treatments along with fusilate and Drive. Drive helped further eradicate any remaining torpedo-grass. Fusilate did the same with the bermudagrass. Once the builder, Landscapes Unlimited, plowed the course under and shaped the main features, McMinn applied methyl bromide to the fairway and tee complexes.

The choice of grass was important. The master plan called for the renovation of all 36 holes. As soon as Hills and McMinn completed The Eagle, McMinn turned his attention to the Pete Dye-designed Heron.

“We wanted to have an excellent playing surface on both courses,” says McMinn, who visited numerous Southern Florida courses, as well as The Ocean Course at Kiawah, which was replanted with paspalum.

McMinn’s and Yoder’s research revealed Sealsle Supreme ranked at or near the top in most categories on paspalum turf trials. Sealsle Supreme also seemed to provide the best putting surface.

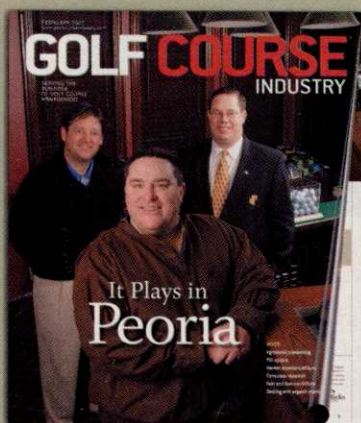
“I had seen many paspalums that were pretty from tee to green,” Yoder says. “But when you got to the putting surface, most paspalums weren’t comparable to TiffEagle bermudagrass

or bentgrass. Sealsle Supreme seems to provide a better putting surface than anything else. All paspalums have good color, but Sealsle Supreme gives a better roll and is easier to maintain green speeds. Others seem to be a bit bumpy. Supreme seems a little smoother and easier to maintain desired green speeds.”

PLANTING THE TURF

McMinn and Yoder chose Pike Creek Turf as their supplier. Pike Creek is one of five certified growers of Sealsle Supreme in the country. But this was the first time the Adel, Ga.-based company had worked on a wall-to-wall project with the same turf.

While supplying a single turf type might not sound difficult, there can be complications because tees, roughs, fairways and greens are all sprigged at different rates.



FLIP FLIP



CLICK CLICK

In print or via our new digital edition, *Golf Course Industry* is the industry’s most turned-to publication for news and product information.

Golf Course Industry’s Digital Edition is the same magazine you rely upon – delivered to your inbox, providing:

- Convenient access to the industry’s leading publication
- Easier to save ‘back issues’ for future reference
- Fully searchable to quickly find topics most relevant to you
- User-friendly format to share articles with co-workers

To receive the industry’s pioneer digital edition, delivered via the leading technology provider for business to business publishing, visit www.golfcourseindustry.com and click on “Magazine” and then click on “Subscribe” and update your subscriber profile.



“You can’t just pile all the grass together and then spread it,” McMinn says. “If you measure the square footage of a green and it requires 100 bushels, you have to make sure there are 100 bushels in the box and it goes to that particular green so you sprig at the right rate. When we got the first load, no one had accounted for that. It was a learning process for both of us.”

The Eagle also required about 37 acres of sod because of its numerous vertical features and mounding. The bunkers and green surrounds, in particular, were sodded heavily.

McMinn’s previous two renovations at The Landings involved bermudagrass and zoysia-grass. He found SeaIsle Supreme had a better rooting structure.

“That helps when laying sod on slopes and it starts raining,” he says. “The quicker it roots down the better.”

Two bad storms struck during construction with one dumping 5.5 inches of rain in a 24-hour period. Six holes suffered significant damage, particularly the 15th.

“It basically blew out everything, and we had to do some rebuilding,” McMinn says. “That set us back two to three weeks for cleanup and resodding some areas. Otherwise, it was a smooth project.”

GROWING IT IN

One of the few drawbacks with paspalum is that it tends to be a bit more prone to disease than bermudagrass, McMinn and Yoder say. During the grow-in, larger amounts of water are needed for turf establishment. Couple that with South Florida’s high humidity, and the stage is set for disease problems.

“We used more fungicides than we might have with other grasses during grow-in because of paspalum being disease-prone,” McMinn says. “We tried to manage that with water. Once it got cold, we backed off as much as possible on irrigation.”

McMinn also fought a daily battle with armyworms, which have a particular affinity for newly planted turf on Southern courses.

GOING FORWARD

One of the advantages of having two courses, particularly during Florida summers, is that McMinn can rotate the two courses for maintenance purposes. One will be available to members for a three-week stretch, while the

other is closed for maintenance. That will give the grounds crew the opportunity to make any needed adjustments to the paspalum-sporting Eagle before snowbirds begin returning to southwest Florida in late October.

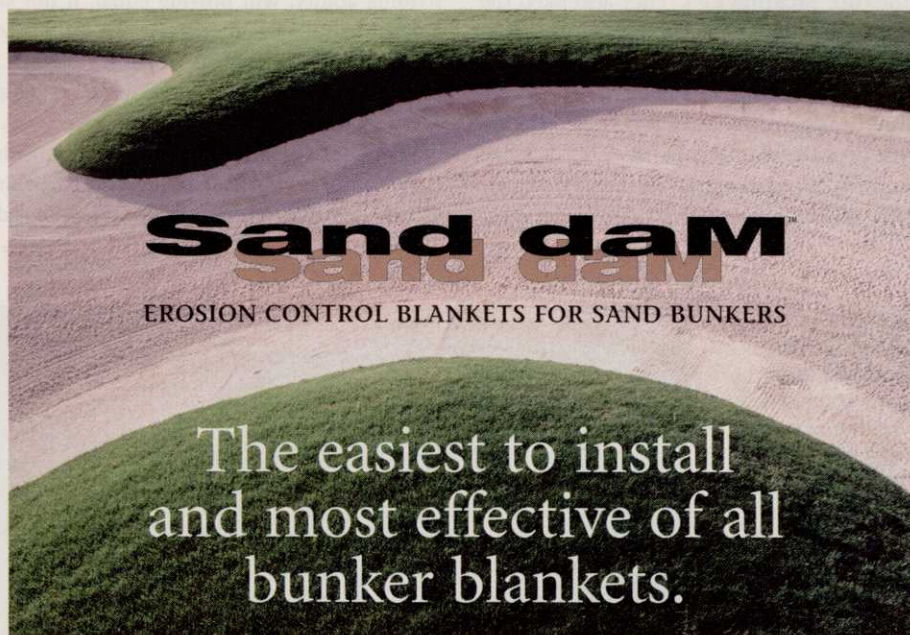
The Oaks’ irrigation water comes from two deep wells with permits to withdraw 500,000 gallons daily. While less salt-laden than effluent, it contains high amounts of bicarbonates, which make the liquid hard and of marginal quality.

The SeaIsle Supreme paspalum grows much better with a less-than-perfect water supply than

bermudagrass, McMinn says.

“A fairly good quality water helps the young paspalum plants grow in better,” Yoder says. “Once it’s established, you can feed it more and more salt. The salt keeps out many of the weeds that would move into bermudagrass. Salt-laden water kills bermudagrass and noxious weeds. Paspalums tolerate effluent much better.”

Planting the same cultivar throughout the course also would simplify irrigation management, especially on a layout like The Eagle that expanded the number of irrigation heads



Sand daM™

EROSION CONTROL BLANKETS FOR SAND BUNKERS

The easiest to install
and most effective of all
bunker blankets.

Now available in three great options

- 1 Hi Performance Sand daM™ for slopes as steep as 60°
- 2 Sand daM™ MR is ideal for projects where high performance and low costs are required
- 3 Install Sand daM™ Lite in greenside bunkers with low angle slopes, or flat bottomed fairway bunkers

JOHN DEERE GOLF & TURF |  Professional Turf Products LLC
ONE SOURCE
TOLL FREE 866-726-3326 PHONE 724-929-2111 FAX 724-929-0282
EMAIL info@proturfproducts.com WEB www.proturfproducts.com

For more information call Toll-Free at 866-726-3326 to find an existing distributor or a John Deere Golf & Turf One Source distributor near you!

COURSE RENOVATION

from 750 to 1,200 as part of the renovation, Yoder says.

"With further watering restrictions likely coming down the road and effluent being about the only option, you need to plan ahead," he says. "You need to make sure the irrigation system is set up to handle effluent and use galvanized steel fixtures that can tolerate higher-salt-content water."

In terms of playability, Sealsle Supreme paspalum grows tighter and denser than bermudagrass. When club members, particularly mid- to high-handicappers, played on other paspalum courses, they loved how high the ball sat on top of the turf, McMinn says. They also liked the way the grass striped when mowed and the dark-green color, much like the Northern courses many play on during the summer.

And because of its waxy leaves, Sealsle Supreme doesn't hold the early-morning dew like bermudagrass, meaning players should find their shoes, socks and pants much drier, Yoder says.

Because of its waxy leaves, Sealsle Supreme doesn't hold morning dew like bermudagrass, says architect Brian Yoder. Photo: The Oaks

"Aesthetically, paspalum definitely beats bermudagrass," McMinn says.

Lower-handicap players sometimes take awhile to adjust to the way the thicker paspalum turf grabs the ball compared to bermudagrass. The ball doesn't bump and run as easily as it does on bermudagrass.

"A good player with a variety of shots around the green might have to use more pitch or flop shots around the green," McMinn says.

Those used to having the variety of grasses on their course providing contrast and definition will be surprised how mowing the same grass at different heights, coupled with paspalum's striping ability, will provide equal, if not superior, definition and contrast, McMinn says. He predicts the rough will be cut at roughly 1.5 inches, fairways at less than 0.5 inch and greens as low as 0.1 inch.

Perhaps the biggest advantage of planting the course entirely with Sealsle Supreme paspalum will be recognized in the future. With Florida

under heavy development pressure, many believe it's only a matter of time before potable water will be unavailable for most courses. Effluent might be the only option, and those courses planted in paspalum will be in the best shape to prosper.

"That's a huge consideration in the Southeast, and we want to be ready," McMinn says. "Water will be the biggest driver for courses selecting this turf type during the next 10 to 20 years."

When all is said and done, the bottom line with any renovation is the reaction of those who play it.

"I've taken many members on tours of the new course and have received so many great comments about the layout and design," says general manager Steve Geisler. "Everyone is excited about getting out there once it opens." **GCI**

Peter Blais is a freelance writer based in North Yarmouth, Maine. He can be reached at pblais@maine.rr.com.

