

Battling back

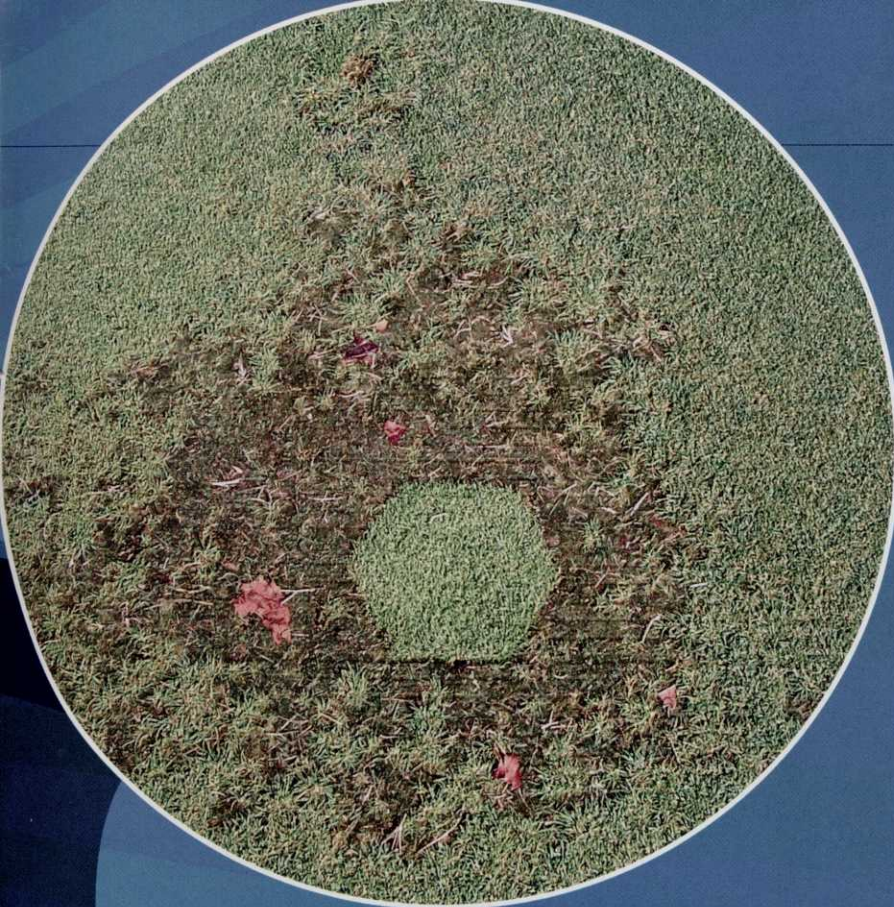
Superintendents describe how they control Anthracnose and meet member expectations.

by Scott Kauffman



Anthracnose appears as irregular yellowed or brown patches in turf.

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Greg Shaffer, superintendent at Elcona Country Club, turned to bi-weekly topdressing to help combat the disease.

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— Jason Adams, Blue Hill Country Club

Greg Shaffer feels pretty good about his annual anthracnose program. In his seventh season at Elcona Country Club in Bristol, Ind., the turning point for Shaffer was a shift in member expectations and an overhaul of his facility’s cultural practices that now allows him to better control anthracnose.

It started with more frequent bi-weekly topdressing. Shaffer says there’s a lot of research showing more frequent topdressing and other cultural practices perhaps do not injure the plant after all.

Another change to Shaffer’s maintenance regimen is semi-annual aeration in the spring and fall.

“We were having issues with the anthracnose based on trying to put member expectations on the forefront of our goal as opposed to turf health,” says Shaffer. “We were low on fertility, aggressively rolling, mowing at low heights. Just the simple fact of trying to keep the members happy. And it came back to bite us a few years ago.”

Of course, any superintendent who has experienced the wrath of

upset members due to inferior greens doesn’t relish that feeling. So Shaffer and his club reevaluated what they were trying to accomplish.

“Some guys are smarter than I am and they learned that before they have issues,” Shaffer says. “We never really dealt with a loss of turf. But with the anthracnose that we had we weren’t able to meet expectations. So it was kind of an uncomfortable circle.”

That’s when the more aggressive practices began. Shaffer usually aerates his greens the first week of April, and once they heal in three to four weeks, the bi-weekly topdressing kicks in. That usually lasts through September, when Elcona prepares for its October aeration.

As soon as Shaffer increased his rate of topdressing, the Purdue University graduate also increased his club’s fertility inputs, nearly doubling his rate of nitrogen to 3.5 pounds per year – sometimes even approaching four pounds depending on the type of foliar program. During the golf season, Shaffer alternates between foliar and root nitrogen applications.

“Every other week we’re either

spraying urea out with our fungicide (at about a tenth of a pound), and on the opposite week we’re spraying ammonium sulfate and watering it into the root,” says Shaffer. “That also gets mixed into the tank with our wetting agent, surfactant or any other type of micronutrients that we’re putting in for the soil.”

Elcona’s greens are about 80-90 percent annual bluegrass, according to Shaffer, so “we’re right in the wheelhouse for anthracnose.” Shaffer says his crew is “probably mowing at a higher height of cut than most guys are in the area.” The Elcona crew rolls its greens about three to four times per week, depending on the event.

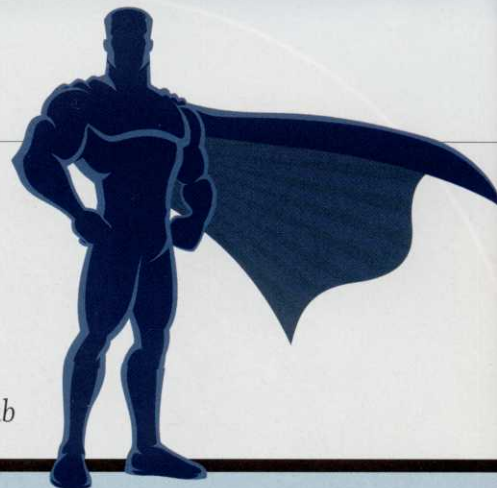
“A lot of the guys are mowing at 100 or under 100,” Shaffer says, “and we’re 115-120 on the (acting gauge).”

Besides keeping the anthracnose at bay, perhaps the best part of his newly adopted maintenance practices is Elcona members haven’t really noticed any effects on the quality of their greens. Membership has downplayed its public need for speed.

“From a playability standpoint, I don’t think they’ve really had to make

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any sacrifices,” Shaffer says. “And not that what we do, we do for the sake of green speed, but the reality is it’s important. That’s kind of one of the things membership hangs its hat on. So one of the things we’ve gotten away from trying to focus on is green speed.”

For example, historically, Elcona staff would always post a green speed by the first tee as of certain morning intervals.

“It got to be a real pain in the rear end because guys’ days would be ruined before they even hit a ball,” Shaffer says. “They’d walk up and see ‘Oh, the speed’s only going to be 10 today.’ So we’ve changed that mindset a little bit that we’re going to more consistency. We still want to meet their expectations as far as speeds – they just don’t know what the speeds are.”

At Blue Hill Country Club in Canton, Mass., superintendent Jason Adams also finds his anthracnose “a little more manageable” these days. Typically, Blue Hill will see signs of anthracnose in late May and early June, especially after cool, wet winters, and a relatively less severe touch of it in the autumn months.

“I’m curious to see what this year brings with the warm weather we’ve had,” says Adams, who is going into his fifth season at Blue Hill. “With it being a drier season and coming out of the heat and spring, I’m hoping the severity isn’t as bad.”

One thing that has helped Adams keep anthracnose in check is continually overseeding his predominantly *Poa annua* greens with bentgrass as much as possible.

“We’re very aggressive,” Adams says. “Every time I aerify, we’ll sponge seed into the greens at least two to three times a year. During my first couple years I might have seeded greens eight to nine times during the growing season. That’s one of the biggest things and because of that, I’ve had some greens here that were probably 99 percent *Poa* when I first got here to the point we got the populations up quite a bit.

“I’ve got some that are as high as 60-70 percent (bent). And I only have three greens on the golf course now that probably have 20 percent bent versus nothing. It’s kind of a painful thing at some points. We’ve lost some *Poa* over the years – a little bit here and there in some of the cleaner cut. We kind of look at it as a silver lining. Yeah, you might lose some of the *Poa*, but it’s an opportunity to get some bentgrass in there.”

According to Adams, anthracnose was so bad at Blue Hill at times it would take the *Poa* right down into the crown. “We’ve come in a Sunday morning and seen the green just riddled with it,” Adams says.

Another significant change in Adams’ cultural practices is an aggressive deep tine “drill and fill” program that started when Adams took over the property in 2008. After evaluating the property, which dates to 1925 and once hosted the 1956 PGA Championship, Adams discovered significant thatch issues on some of the greens and some very heavy soils 4 inches below the surface. The combination of the two resulted in greens with severe dry spots, inconsistent

playing surfaces and poor drainage after heavy precipitation.

“By doing more deep tine, drill and fill (approximately 40 tons of sand was drilled into 8,500 square feet of greens last fall), we’re not staying as wet and soft on top for that disease,” says Adams. “Plus we’re top-dressing more often than we have in the past.”

Increasing the rate as much as 12-14 times now per year, Adams matches what he did at his previous club, after doing it just six to seven times historically at Blue Hill.

“For this particular club it was a lot busier and they didn’t like to see a lot of disruptions as far as green surfaces,” Adams says. “We’re going to go back probably to that 12-14 times. The only thing we’re going to do this year during the growing months (June-August) when this place is really packed wall-to-wall is do more of that bagged dry sand and spread it by hand.”

On the chemical front, Adams is “changing this up by using more of DMI” like Banner or tebuconazole, and even formulates his pesticide program more around anthracnose than anything right now. Another noticeable difference from a fertility perspective is Adams will likely use higher amounts of potassium this year.

“We played around with it last year and saw a pretty significant response,” Adams says. “I think we’re using 0-0-28 potassium fertilizer and we’re going to half pound rates per month. It seemed like going into fall we had to battle the disease far less than

we’ve had to in the past.”

A backup tool he is starting to use with success is Civitas, a mineral oil loaded with some bionutrition. Adams mixes it with Banner at half rates and gets instant results.

“Last year when we had the hurricane blow through,” Adams says, “we were just loaded with anthracnose about two to three days after. We’ll spray (Civitas) and it almost cleans everything up in a matter of two to three days. It’s amazing.”

Adams cautions to not use the oil once it warms up to 82-83 degrees because he’s seen it discolor or burn the tips of the annual bluegrass on some of Blue Hill’s collars.

“In the spring and fall when things are cooler, the moisture levels are better and there’s less stress on the plant,” Adams says. “You’ve got better roots on your plants so you don’t seem to have any issues. I just don’t spray it in the heat of the summer.”

Constantly juggling risk-reward attributes of various anthracnose practices with the watchful eye of demanding members is what makes this insidious disease so tough.

“If we didn’t have to worry about it and we could do what we want when we want as far as topdressing and skipping mowing, it would probably be a lot easier to control this disease,” says Adams. **GCI**

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