

Real-Life Solutions

■ STONERIDGE GC, PONTE VEDRA BEACH, FLA.

Certain By Seed

Sodding is faster, but designer Bobby Weed used seed on the new Stoneridge GC because he felt it would create a more lasting course



Situation

To sod or seed the new Stoneridge GC near St. Paul, Minn.? Using sod would speed the course's opening and generate more revenue. But using seed made more sense.

Answer

Architect Bobby Weed decided on seed to capitalize on the site's natural advantages. Because the on-site material was so good, using sod would have introduced a layer of foreign soil that would not benefit the course in the long run.

The economics of building a new golf course force many projects to sod, speeding the course's opening so it will generate money more quickly.

In general, Bobby Weed, a golf course architect from Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., understands that philosophy, but he recently encountered a project near St. Paul, Minn., that persuaded him to go in the other direction. Don't get him wrong: Weed wanted to open the course, Stoneridge GC, as soon as possible. But he decided on seed rather than sod in spite of its longer grow-in period.

"We didn't use a single slab of sod during grassing," Weed says. "Every square foot of the site was seeded."

The situation

This approach capitalized on the site's natural advantages. The course's back nine wound through an abandoned sand quarry from which capping material was

mined for in-play areas.

"We stripped topsoil off the golf holes down to the gravelly subsoil, and then came back with several feet of clean sand and shaped in that," Weed explains. "The sand we mined was so clean that it could be screened for gravel and pass the USGA particle-size analysis for greens mix."

Because the on-site material was so good, Weed says using sod would have introduced a layer of foreign soil that would not benefit the course over the long run.

"Agronomically, seeding is ideal," Weed says. "As one superintendent once told me, using sod is like having someone else raise your children. You can never be sure what you are introducing."

The process

Weed used a number of soil stabilization methods extensively throughout construction. Even the gentlest slopes were covered with erosion control blankets.

The course chose

Agronomically, seeding is ideal, says architect Bobby Weed. It gives you more control over the grassing plan.

biodegradable straw mats for the primary rough areas, non-biodegradable straw mats in out-of-play areas and Futera mats around tees and on fairways, says Stoneridge superintendent Hugh Lynch, who will oversee the course when it opens in July. Hydroseeding created bunker faces and the steepest slopes.

"We incorporated a soil-binding polymer into the slurry to help hold the slopes," Lynch explains. "The high percolation rate of the sand let the polymer penetrate downward to hold things together."

In addition to the matting, silt fence and sand bags were used to help protect newly seeded areas along the base of slopes.

The seed-only approach gave Weed and Lynch greater flexibility and control over the grassing plan. For example, Weed wanted as much

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fescue on the bunker faces as possible. Using the hydroseed and polymer, Weed seeded the bunkers with an 80/20 fescue/bluegrass mix, a much higher ratio than could be found at local sod farms.

Lynch also tweaked the seed mix to help provide quick cover. Regreen, a sterile oat that germinates in four to five days, was used in the native grass areas.

"The longer prairie grasses will not be fully mature for two years," Lynch says. "Regreen provides a similar look, but dies away after two years, letting the other grasses take over."

Interestingly, ryegrass, a

champion for quick germination, was not used. Weed says the aggressive nature of ryegrass would create long-term playability concerns in the roughs.

Obviously, using only seed presented some practical difficulties. Bunker faces located outside the coverage of the irrigation system have not filled in as quickly as those receiving water. Greens, tees and fairways were seeded with L-93 bentgrass, which germinated faster and required maintenance well ahead of the fescue/bluegrass roughs.

"Most courses under construction separate bentgrass areas from the roughs with a

sod belt," Lynch says. "Not having that belt has been a challenge, as my mowers are turning around on new seedlings."

Observations

However, the no-sod approach helped Weed achieve interesting design objectives that may not have been possible otherwise.

"The course is similar to the heathland layouts overseas," Weed notes. "We tried to duplicate their firm conditions and rugged look. Using only seed prevented us from building in the hard edge between grass lines that sod creates. We encouraged overlapping of seed, especially

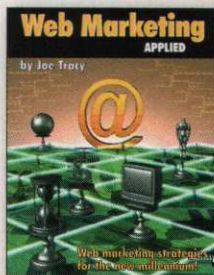
between the fairway and primary rough, to help achieve a lacy, undefined edge."

Hydroseeding the bunker faces will also allow Weed to hand edge the final outline of the sand.

"Unlike most courses, the native material was the bunker sand," he explains "By seeding right into it, we can wait until after germination to cut out the final edge of the bunker."

The use of the erosion control blanket also helped keep construction on schedule because large areas could be prepped, seeded and matted at once. The cost of the seed and blanket was less than sod, he adds. ■

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