

Good Greens and Good Fortune

Superintendent happens upon overseeding solution by sheer luck

BY DAVID ROULE

Speed and consistency — that's the dilemma. One of the biggest problems at any golf course is the perennial pain in the neck regarding fast and consistent green speed. The faster we make the greens, the faster golfers want them.

The problem

I've never had any major agronomic problems with the greens at the courses I've worked, including Elmwood CC in White Plains, N.Y., where I've been superintendent since 1999. But green speed is a different story, thanks primarily to *Poa annua*.

At Delwood CC in New City, N.Y., where I worked before coming to Elmwood, fast greens were sometimes inconsistent because of the bentgrass/*Poa* putting surface. Because *Poa* is less resistant to disease and insect damage, diseases like summer patch and pythium were a constant threat in wet weather because of the course's low height of cut, high soil pH and poor surface drainage. All of this contributed to an erratic putting surface.

Dealing with the *Poa* was a merry-go-round experience. I wanted to keep it alive, but I didn't want it to overtake the greens. The crew and I syringed the *Poa* to keep it alive in the hot weather, but it was a constant battle to keep it from spreading.

I wish we could have gassed the greens and started anew, but that's expensive and time-

consuming. However, I discovered a new and less-expensive method to upstage *Poa* and achieve fast and consistent green speed.

The solution

I happened upon the solution by sheer luck almost five years ago. We were overseeding the greens with hybrid bentgrass seeds we thought would yield a more aggressive grass that would be able to maintain lower heights of cut. But during the overseeding process, we ran out of seed for the last two holes — a sand-based green and a push-up green.

So we tried Penn G-2 on the last two greens. Three days later, we had great germination on the last two greens, but had no visual growth on the other 16.

One week later, the two greens were filled with new seedlings. This was not unusual in aerifying holes, but what was surprising was that two weeks later the grass was creeping beyond anything I've ever encountered. We were ecstatic with the results, but wary. We had seen other grass start like that and then fade. We decided to overseed all the greens with Penn G-2. The other greens displayed the same results.

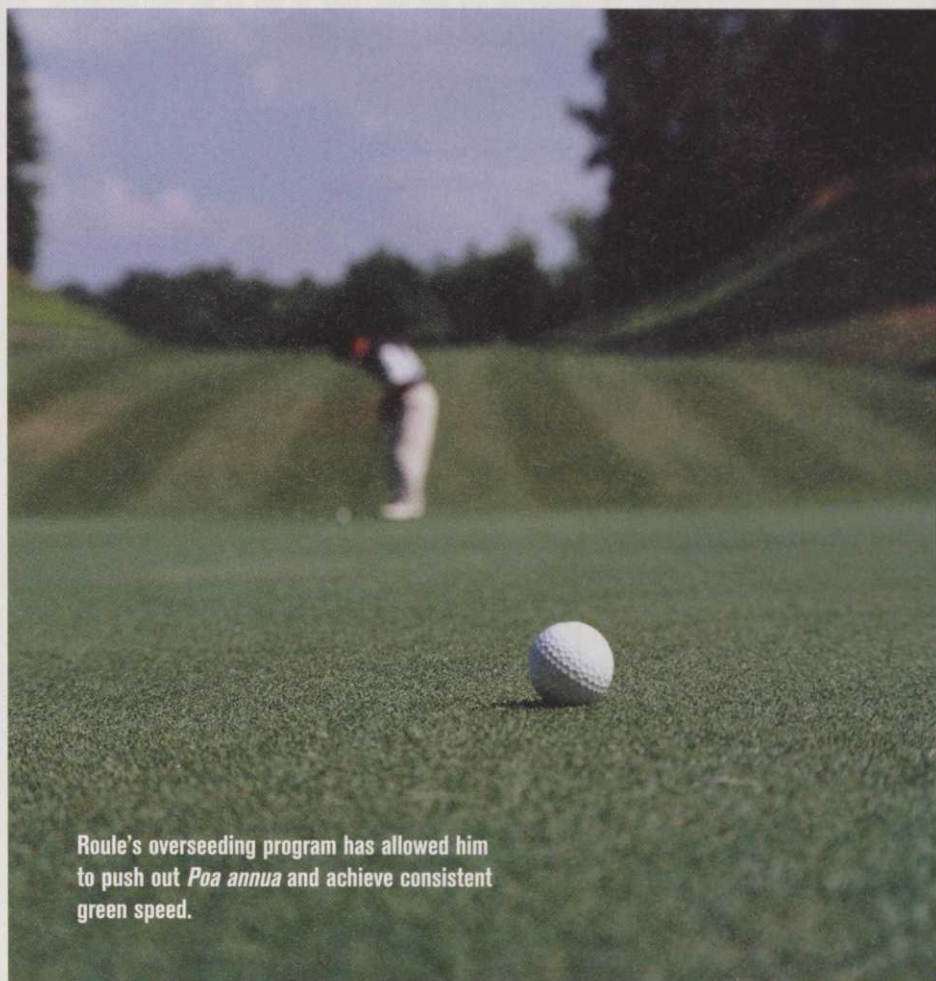
Next, we implemented a plant growth regulator program using TGR. We figured if we could stop the *Poa* from seeding and growing while we were overseeding with the Penn G-2, the new bentgrass would creep aggressively. But there was a dilemma. Delwood's members

Problem

Dealing with *Poa annua* on greens is a constant challenge. You want to keep it alive, but you don't want it to spread.

Solution

An overseeding program featuring Penn G-2, which crept aggressively, helped oust the *Poa*. A biostimulant made the Penn G-2 spread even faster and develop an excellent root system.



Roule's overseeding program has allowed him to push out *Poa annua* and achieve consistent green speed.

preferred dark green-colored greens, and plant growth regulators tend to discolor *Poa*. So we applied Roots 123 — a product made of chelated iron, a wetting agent from the Yuka plant and biostimulants — to the greens.

This gave us not only a brilliant dark green plant with no growth, but it helped our surface water retention and solved our surface drainage problem. The biostimulants made the bentgrass spread even faster and develop root systems we never had before.

We implemented virtually the same program with heavier doses of PGRs on the greens when I came to Elmwood. It has proved so successful that we use the program every month of the growing season.

Our green speed has increased and is more consistent — no matter what the weather. The program has also let us reduce watering and syringing of our greens during the season.

Outlook

When we overseed the greens with Penn G-2,

we aerify with small, solid tines and use a light broom to push the seeds into the holes. Few members notice the small needle-sized holes, and the greens are deep-tined twice a year to improve drainage.

A drawback of the Penn G-2 bentgrass is that it has to be mowed almost daily to keep its creeping pattern low. So we have to back-lap our mowers more often to keep a sharp cut. Still, that's not a bad tradeoff for faster greens.

Other courses have had success with the program, and members and players at those places didn't even know the greens were undergoing a surface renovation to attain a fast, consistent green speed.

The bottom line: This program has allowed the bentgrass to push out the *Poa*. The greens are now more than 85 percent bentgrass and are no longer considered *Poa*/bent. ■

Roule is superintendent of Elmwood CC in White Plains, N.Y. He has been a superintendent for 30 years.

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Stable Environment

Slow-release fertilizer helps maintain healthy turf on a high-traffic course

BY MICHAEL KARDELIS

Maintaining a top-notch golf course while being kind to the environment is tough enough. When you throw in high traffic, it's enough to give a superintendent a migraine.

Memorial Park GC in Houston handles 70,000 rounds per year, almost double the national average for 18-hole municipal courses. Superintendent Jason Harsh had to devise a creative fertilizer strategy to handle the volume of golfers, remain environmentally friendly

Problem

A high volume of golfers, combined with a commitment to environmental sensitivity, makes creating an adequate fertilizer schedule difficult.

Solution

Stabilized nitrogen fertilizers provide a source of nitrogen that can be applied year-round once a week to provide the turf with proper nutrition despite being overrun with golfers nearly every day.



Fertilization creativity is a must for a course that handles 200 to 300 rounds per day, as Memorial Park CC in Houston does.

and provide his turf with proper nutrition.

"Providing an enjoyable and environmentally friendly course is sometimes difficult with a course that handles this many rounds of golf," Harsh says. "But it can be done."

The problem

Harsh served as assistant superintendent at Memorial Park for one year before taking over as superintendent in June 1997. The grounds crew had been struggling with growing and maintaining turf amid almost constant play. "Few people have



been exposed to the problem of accomplishing any maintenance on a golf course that sees 250 to 300 rounds each day," Harsh says.

Heavy tournament schedules and adverse weather tacked on additional complications. Harsh faced a challenge to create a fertilization program that would meet the

Memorial Park superintendent Jason Harsh says it's a plus that stabilized nitrogen doesn't depend on soil microbes to break it down.

nutritional needs of the turf while working around the golfers.

"It's a big challenge to produce quality turf," Harsh says. "As most super-

intendents know, we have only a limited time to fertilize.”

With so many pressures on the turf program, Memorial Park needed immediate attention.

The solution

Targeting year-round color and constant growth as top priorities, Harsh looked for a fertilizer with a stabilized-nitrogen base.

Stabilized-nitrogen products improve nitrogen efficiency by means of a urease inhibitor and a nitrification inhibitor. The inhibitors modify soil chemistry to extend nitrogen availability. Although stabilized-nitrogen products provide all the benefits of slow-release fertilizers, manufacturing economies make them less expensive than organic, coated and complex-chain products, according to Al Nees, vice president of turf and ornamental sales for Agrotain International, a company that manufactures stabilized-nitrogen products. Since they function like slow-release products, superintendents can make fewer applications year-round.

To meet his needs, Harsh chose UMAXX, an Agrotain product that combines N (n-Butyl) thiophosphoric triamide (NBPT) and dicyandiamide (DCD), which are both inhibitors. NBPT is a urease inhibitor that stops nitrogen volatilization, while DCD keeps the nitrogen in its ammoniacal form longer, which plants absorb more easily. DCD also keeps the nitrogen in the soil longer and prevents leaching and denitrification.

The product doesn't rely on outside agents like water or heat to release its nutrients. Instead, it works in tandem with nature to keep nitrogen in a usable form longer in the root zone. As a result, Harsh can apply less fertilizer.

Harsh uses both granular and liquid applications of stabilized nitrogen to fertilize his course. Because so many rounds are played at Memorial

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With lakes on the course, Memorial Park has to pay close attention to the environmental impact of its fertilizer.

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**BART MILLER, GCS
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Another thing the Whiskey Creek superintendent likes about fine-tuning his turf color with Ferromec AC: This liquid iron promotes no significant topgrowth. "It avoids problems like you see when plants are all pumped up from too much N," Bart explains.

The combination of sulfur, iron and urea in Ferromec AC is remarkably fast acting. "I can send the sprayer out this morning and be looking at visibly darker grass tomorrow — maybe even today!," Miller said.



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Real-Life Solutions

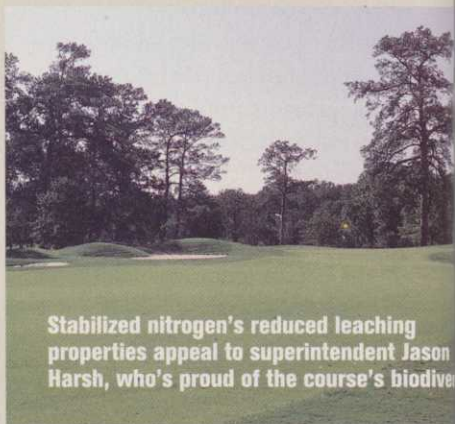
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Park each day, he has only one day per week to complete the entire process.

"I can put down a stabilized-nitrogen fertilizer anytime of the year, and it doesn't need to be watered in right away. It isn't dependent on soil microbes to break it down. That's a plus."

As committed as he is to meeting the challenges of healthy turf, Harsh believes passionately in environmental friendliness. He is an active member of the Audubon Signature Program, which promotes wildlife conservation and habitat enhancement. He's proud of the biodiversity on his course, so the reduced leaching properties of stabilized nitrogen also appeal to him.

"Our course provides a place for wildlife to live and players to enjoy rounds of golf, while still being environmentally friendly," Harsh said. "The consistency of the products that I use



Stabilized nitrogen's reduced leaching properties appeal to superintendent Jason Harsh, who's proud of the course's biodi-

and involvement from management help keep my course in the best environmental condition possible."

Harsh is proud of the professional appearance at his course, and he believes stabilized nitrogen helps create it. Continuing to uphold the top-notch look of the course with environmentally oriented practices will always be a top priority. ■

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