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.

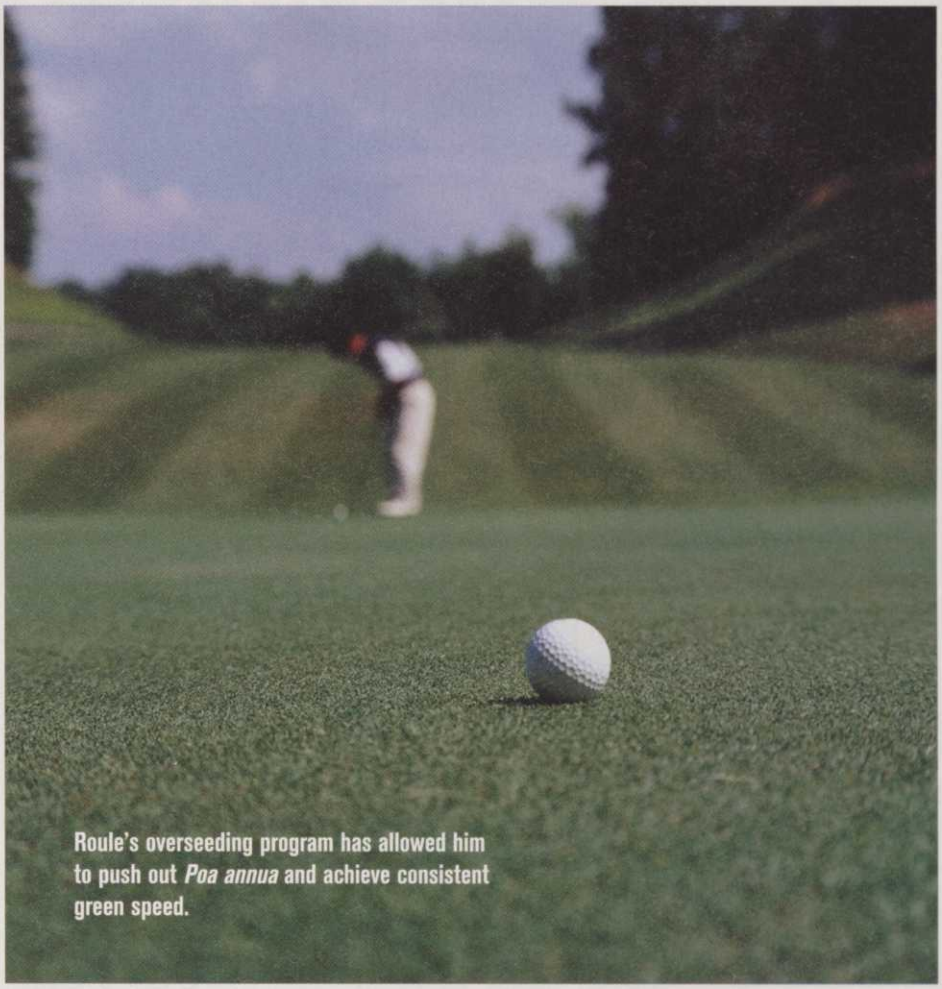
Next, we implemented a plant growth regulator program using TGR. We figured if we could stop the *Poa* from seeding and growing while we were overseeding with the Penn G-2, the new bentgrass would creep aggressively. But there was a dilemma. Delwood's members

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 creeped 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.

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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 backlap 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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