

My friend had an early July date with the Ocean Course at the Kiawah Island Golf Resort in South Carolina. But about two weeks before the big meeting, his date up and canceled on him. My jilted friend was told that the course's greens were ill. Badly. Again.

It was just last year that the Ocean Course, one of Pete Dye's most spectacular designs, regrassed its greens as part of an overall renovation. But in mid-June the course announced it was shutting down for the summer for another greens regrassing. The Tifeagle bermudagrass greens the course planted last year fizzled fast—like the Detroit Tigers in May.

From a business point of view, this is not good news for any course, let alone one of the greatest resort courses in the world. From an image standpoint, the news had to be a tidal wave of embarrassment for the Ocean Course. The talk in the golf world went something like this, "Now what's wrong with the Ocean Course's greens?"

Not surprisingly, the superintendent who oversaw last year's greens renovation is no longer at the course. The course also has a new director of golf, Roger Warren, who began his post in April. One might think that Warren wouldn't want to talk turf in light of the Ocean Course's situation. A lot of guys in his position would issue the standard "no comment" to avoid talking about the matter.

But that's not the case at all with Warren, who spoke to me candidly about the Ocean Course's problem greens and what the course is doing to repair them. OK, maybe the heat isn't on Warren as much because he's new to the course, and he has nothing to do with the Tifeagle tank job. Hence, he's more comfortable talking to the media. But give him credit for not avoiding the limelight, which in this case is *not* flattering, and talking about what's wrong.

Warren probably realized that a "no comment" on the matter could fuel more speculation about it. And speculation has a tendency to spin the rumor mill.

Warren took the high road, which was the right thing to do. He talked openly about what happened, and he didn't try to spin anything.

What happened was the Tifeagle didn't tran-

No 'No Comment' from Ocean Course

BY LARRY AYLWARD



GIVE ROGER WARREN CREDIT FOR NOT AVOIDING THE LIMELIGHT, WHICH IN THIS CASE IS HARDLY FLATTERING

sition back in the spring after the *Poa trivialis* overseed died out. "If we would have left the golf course open, we would have had people basically playing on sand and dirt," Warren says.

What caused the Tifeagle's demise was a combination of things, including a greensmix that led to a life-in-the-fast-lane percolation rate that proved deadly for the turf. "The water was moving through very fast, and the root structure couldn't absorb the water at the rate it needed," Warren says. "The turf couldn't hold any nutrients. So it was always under stress."

It was a bad decision to go with the greensmix, which was not the standard 80-20 (80 percent sand and 20 percent organic) formula, Warren says. That fateful decision rested mainly on the shoulders of the course's superintendent, who Warren says was dismissed for several reasons.

To fix the greens, the Ocean Course reseeded them with a new and untested variety of seashore paspalum called OC03, which stands for "Ocean Course '03." One might think the Ocean Course, after two mishaps in one year, would play it conservative in this department. While using seashore paspalum isn't akin to a devil-may-care roll of the dice on a Vegas crap table, it's somewhat venturesome. The straight-up Warren acknowledges that. "There's some risk associated with this," he says.

Warren says the greens could've been resodded with bermuda, and the course could've reopened by Aug. 1. But he says the right thing to do "for the long-term vitality and reputation" of the course was to reseed the greens with paspalum.

Like this controversial matter needed a point man that didn't play the "no comment" card when asked a question, the Ocean Course needs some good news for its greens. Here's hoping paspalum provides it.

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