

# Everything you always wanted to know about transition management\*

\* BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

## Bayer Environmental Science's summit draws top turf experts

By Larry Aylward, Editor

**W**hat do you get when you put 20 turf professors in a room to talk about transition management? The answer, of course, is obvious: You get a lot of scientific discussion — some intense and passionate — about turf. But what's not so obvious is you also get a lot of laughs. These well-educated turf doctors from the warm-season turfgrass zones definitely don't lack a sense of humor. (Betcha didn't know that Dave Kopec from the University of Arizona is a big Little Rascals' fan?)

The turf experts, including Kopec, Fred Yelverton from North Carolina State, Shawn Askew and Erik Ervin from Virginia Tech University, Tim Murphy from the University of Georgia, Bert McCarty from Clemson University and others, comprised the main course of the recent Transition Management Summit held in San Francisco, sponsored by Bayer Environmental Science. The two-day conference featured nearly 40 people, including several turf experts from Bayer, such as Don Myers and Bruce Monke.

Of course, the event was dominated with discussion about transition of bermudagrass to ryegrass and back to bermudagrass. Topics included new bermudagrass cultivars and the influence of fungicides on transition of bermudagrass greens.

The turf professors also shared results of two-year transition studies on Bayer's latest sulfonylurea herbicide, Revolver, which eradicates ryegrass during overseeding.

### Leading off ...

Who better to give a presentation on the history of overseeding than Stanley Zontek, director of the USGA Green Section's Mid-Atlantic region. Nobody knows where overseeding originated, but Zontek likens it to having its own eras.

"The first era was the natural era," Zontek said, noting that it probably began sometime in the 1950s. "That's when Mother Nature did the overseeding for us."

Winter weeds took their place in the dormant bermudagrass. It wasn't pretty, but nobody said it had to be. "That was your winter color — take it or leave it," Zontek said.

The late '60s brought the era of winter maintenance, Zontek noted. That's when the early, basic herbicides were used to kill weeds. The adolescent era occurred in the early '70s. "That's when a lot of people tried a lot of different things," Zontek said.

Zontek joined the USGA as an agronomist in 1971, which was also the era of the great debate between the pros and cons of using domestic ryegrass vs. annual ryegrass in overseeding, he said.



Zontek remembers Augusta National spending \$100,000 on overseeding. He recalls bermudagrass greens being overseeded with rates of annual ryegrass at 30 pounds per square 1,000 feet. He remembers superintendents trying aerators and slicers in accordance with overseeding for the first times. "There was a lot of testing and people trying different things to figure out the best way of doing this," Zontek said.

The '80s and early '90s signified the adult era. Overseeding came into its own and was universally accepted as Southern golf courses spent more money to keep their courses green in the winter. All of this was made possible by improved varieties of perennial ryegrass, Zontek noted.

Zontek says the turf industry is currently in the next era — or the maturity era. The name speaks for itself. Zontek also noted that there's a sub era in the maturity era called "the perfect course." Zontek said golfers want perfect courses in the spring, summer, fall and winter.

The last era is called managed care, Zontek said. "We're entering a new era of managed care where we're using chemicals to manage the transition of these overseeded grasses."

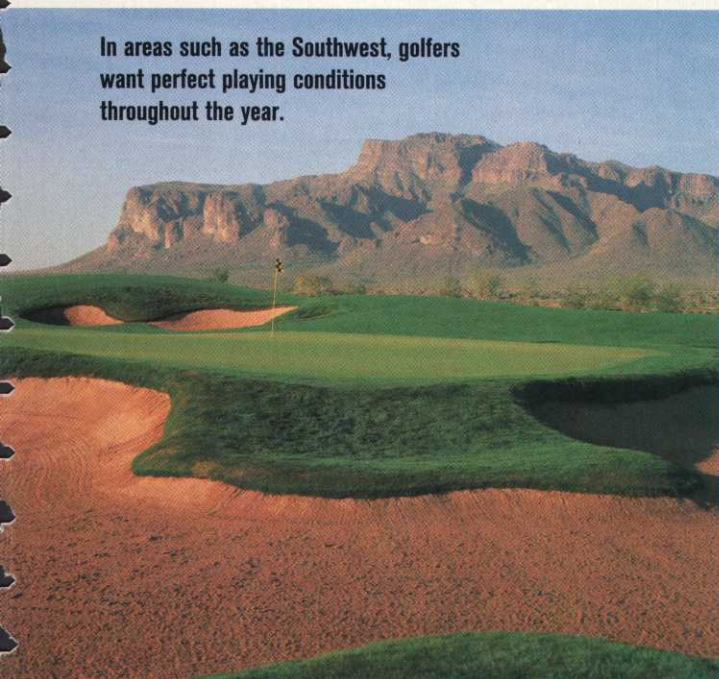
#### Misery loves ...

Shawn Emerson, director of agronomy for the Golf Club at Desert Mountain in Scottsdale, Ariz., was the only superintendent at the Transition Management Summit. However, he was the perfect superintendent to have on hand. The 41-year-old Emerson has participated in more than 50 golf course overseedings in his career. "I can't think of anyone who has put himself through more misery than I have," he said, only half-jokingly.

You could say Emerson has a stressful job, especially when

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In areas such as the Southwest, golfers want perfect playing conditions throughout the year.



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## Transition Management

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it comes to overseeding at Desert Mountain, which consists of six Jack Nicklaus-designed courses each with maintenance budgets of \$1.9 million. Golfers expect near perfection at Desert Mountain, and overseeding is not always perfect or pretty for that matter.

"The agronomic framework [for overseeding] starts with revenue," Emerson says. "The more money I make, the more money I can spend on my golf course."

Desert Mountain gains 90 percent of its rounds and revenue from Oct. 15 through June 15. The problem Emerson faced during that time was that bermudagrass would begin to green in April but ryegrass wouldn't die until July. "That means I only had July through September to grow in the bermudagrass, which wasn't enough time," Emerson said, noting that bermudagrass doesn't grow well when it has competition from another variety.

Three years ago Emerson began "spraying out" — or using herbicides to eradicate the ryegrass — with the goal of getting the bermudagrass to fully establish by mid-July. It took



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**STANLEY ZONTEK, DIRECTOR OF  
THE USGA GREEN'S SECTION  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION**

a few years for that to happen — the turf had to adjust to the process and the course wasn't always aesthetically pleasing — but Emerson is satisfied with the results. He says other superintendents should consider using herbicides such as Revolver to eradicate ryegrass because it makes transition so much easier.

Speaking of transition, Emerson asked the turf professors if the word was the proper term to describe the action. He pointed out that "transition" is usually associated with being seamless.

"I don't know if this is seamless," Emerson said of overseeding. "I think 'convergence' is a better word for it."

### Who needs it?

While everybody was talking about the challenges of transition, Pat O'Brien, director of the USGA Green Section's Southeast Region,

offered a solution: don't overseed.

"I've seen superintendents go through the pain and agony of overseeding in the Southeast," he said, noting that some superintendents have scrapped the process.

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O'Brien contends that overseeding is tough on bermudagrass' roots and can cause a thatch buildup over time.

"Every time you overseed, it doesn't just disappear," he said. "It deposits a huge organic matter in the upper root zone."

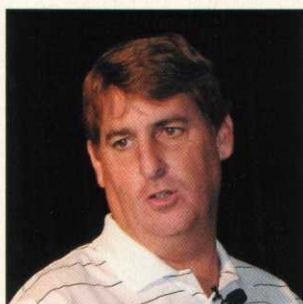
O'Brien says many Southern superintendents, who have ultradwarf bermudagrass on their courses, are now painting the greens instead of overseeding them.

"You can turn a dormant bermudagrass green into a surface that looks like the finest bentgrass you'll ever see in your life," O'Brien said with a smile, noting that it only takes about 30 minutes to paint one green with the appropriate tools.

### The rest

Here are a few of the other highlights from the summit:

- In his talk on "Bermudagrass Cultivar Effects on Transition Success," Virginia Tech's Askew noted that while an increased ryegrass seeding rate increases the speed of green cover during fall transition, the seeding rate has little influence on spring tran-



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**SHAWN EMERSON, DIRECTOR OF AGRONOMY FOR THE GOLF CLUB AT DESERT MOUNTAIN**

sition back to bermudagrass. However, he noted that slower-growing bermudagrass cultivars require more aggressive management during spring transition.

- Yelverton's topic for discussion was "What Happens to Bermudagrass During Spring Transition?" "One of the things that can happen is that it can die," Yelverton warned.

He pointed that more heat-tolerant ryegrasses have made transition more of a problem in the spring. Yelverton also said that bermudagrass needs light for the best transition. "It's well documented that bermudagrass does not like shade," he added.

- Eric Kalasz, Bayer's marketing manager, added a little marketing to the turf science mix. Kalasz said chemical manufacturers have a list of challenges facing them

now and in the future, including:

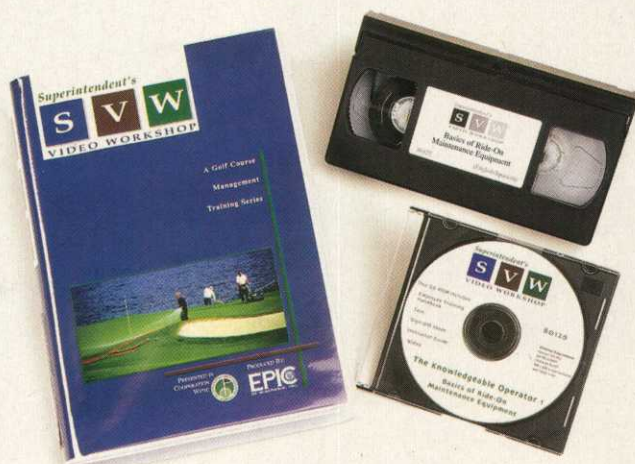
- consolidation at all levels;
- more restrictive regulations;
- loss of older chemistry;
- increasing generic competition; and
- a struggle for differentiation. ■

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