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Dialed In


By Robert Vavrek, Senior Agronomist USGA Green Section

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I was in a rut. It seemed like every course I visited was having issues with excessive organic matter accumulation in the upper soil profile of 5- to 8-year-old greens. Some were new, some were completely rebuilt, some were fumigated then regrassed, but all were seeded to an improved, ultra-dense cultivar of bentgrass. Spongy, pitted ball marks, black layer, moss, algae...you name it, they had it. The problem was easy to diagnose and the cause was always some combination of too much water, too much nitrogen, not enough cultivation and not enough topdressing.

You begin to wonder if thatch problems on new greens are inevitable until you finally

visit a course where the superintendent "gets it." They have the topdressing, cultivation, fertility and irrigation practices dialed in from day one. The greens provide golfers a superior putting surface with a minimal buildup of organic matter. In fact, you can't even find the grow-in layer that occurs during establishment. Those visits always energize me and I can make unpopular recommendations of aggressive cultivation and topdressing to other courses with more confidence.

Need proof? Check out the soil profile of this over 5-year-old bentgrass green...great surface and no thatch. With the office being located in Milwaukee, there was only one last statement to make at the conclusion of this enjoyable visit; "It's Miller time, and I'm buying!" 



This is a great example of how to manage an ultra-dense cultivar of creeping bentgrass on a new sand-based green. The putting surface has been open to play for almost six years, but timely inputs of cultivation and sand make it difficult to distinguish the original construction mix from the topdressing accumulation.

Coming Events!

Tuesday August 20th, Joint meeting w/NGL, Stevens Point CC, St. Point, Host - John Femal

Monday September 16th, Wee One, Pine Hills CC, Sheboygan, Host - Rod Johnson

Monday September 23rd, WTA Golf Fundraiser, Maple Bluff CC, Host - Josh Lepine CGCS

Monday October 1, NGLGCSA Crew Outing - The Woods Golf Course, Ed Hoover

Saturday October 5th, Couples Outing/Party, Wild Rock GC, WI Dells, Host Michael Blazich

Tues and Wed Dec 10th-11th, Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium, American Club, Kohler

Tuesday January 14th, WTA Turfgrass Research Day, Pyle Center, Madison

Feb 2-7, Golf Industry Show, GCSAA Conference, Orlando FL

Monday March 3rd, WGCSA Spring Business Meeting, Fond du Lac



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Better Grasses Make For Better Fairways

By **Jim Skurolski**, Senior Agronomist USGA Green Section, Northeast Region.

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The golf industry is being pressured on multiple fronts, including heightened scrutiny over the use of water, pesticides, and other resources. A sluggish economy and stagnant growth in play have created a challenging business environment. The uphill road just got a little steeper with recent droughts and widely fluctuating weather conditions adding even more stress and challenge to golf course maintenance operations.

Turf managers are expected to produce quality course conditioning to satisfy golfer expectations in this changing environment and, to their credit, most do. However, continuing to do so only becomes more difficult and costly as pressures intensify. Therefore, isn't it critical that our industry take every available measure to enable continued success? I certainly think so.

But where does one begin? Arguably the first step is for golf facilities to maintain course infrastructure and implement programs and maintenance practices that provide the best opportunity for success. Because this gets to the very core of practically every aspect of golf course operations, perhaps there is no better place to start than to utilize the best turfgrasses available; hence the focus of this article.

Even the best management practices and growing conditions will not compensate for inherently inferior turfgrass plants. Unfortunately, utilizing new, improved turfgrasses requires that the current stand be eliminated. Regrassing programs continue to be the best way to establish a new stand of turf. The concept has been widely accepted for putting greens, but it makes even more sense for fairways.

Under the right circumstances, regrassing provides a fresh start, a clean palette.



Older golf facilities frequently contend with a mixture of cool-season species, including creeping bentgrass, perennial ryegrass, and annual bluegrass. Fairway regrassing is the most effective means to eradicate unwanted turfgrasses and establish a new species or cultivar that will provide a more uniform playing surface that can be managed with less water and pesticides.



Glyphosate, a nonselective herbicide, provides control of existing vegetation, allowing new turfgrasses to establish without weed competition.

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Old technology is frequently replaced with new, and the same goes for turfgrasses as newer, improved varieties become available. This includes turfgrasses that boast greater resistance to disease and are selected for their ability to better tolerate traffic, shade, drought stress, and temperature extremes, qualities that will make it possible to manage the turf with less water and fewer pesticides while producing firm and uniform playing surfaces. A fairway regrassing project is indeed ambitious, but the reward is such that it deserves greater consideration by more golf facilities.

WE HAVE THE TURFGRASSES!

The USGA Turfgrass and Environmental Research Program has invested in turfgrass breeding to produce turfgrasses that are vastly improved over those that were available even 10 to 15 years ago. New cultivars provide excellent playing quality and can be managed with less water, provide higher levels of disease resistance, and exhibit greater tolerance to environmental stress.



A fairway recently treated with glyphosate is overseeded with creeping bentgrass as part of the renovation process

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Again, we have the turfgrasses. We just need golf facilities to utilize them. While inter-seeding or spot-seeding programs may improve surface quality to a very limited extent, complete regrassing is necessary to realize the full potential of improved turfgrasses.

Fairway grassing options are extensive. Creeping bentgrass, colonial bentgrass, bentgrass/fine fescue mixtures, and Kentucky bluegrass are the most common selections for fairways in northern climates. It takes some effort to identify the species and cultivars best suited for your site and growing conditions. The opportunity to regrass surfaces is usually a one-time deal, so the selection process is critical, as is being willing to invest in the best seed or sod that is available. Your regional Green Section agronomist can assist in selecting the best turfgrass option for your facility.

WHERE THERE IS A WILL, THERE IS A WAY

Fairway regrassing is not for the faint of heart. Mere mention of killing grass on purpose and closing the course is sure to attract a firestorm of criticism. A convincing case must be made to gain approval. The anticipated benefits resulting from regrassing must be significant, clear, and deemed critical to the success of the facility. Proposals should emphasize the potential to significantly reduce water and pesticide use, improve playability, and create more reliable and aesthetically pleasing fairways. The age-old adage "there is nothing like rapid and complete failure to promote action" may be accurate in regard to regrassing programs at some facilities.

Hopefully, fairway regrassing programs are not predicated on turf failure alone. A more effective approach is to take action before problems occur. This allows the project to be planned effectively at reduced cost and with fewer disruptions and surprises. Ultimately, planning will lead to a better finished product.

Most fairway regrassing projects at northern golf facilities are initiated in late July or August, when a nonselective herbicide is applied to control the existing turf stand. Shortly thereafter the fairways are seeded or sodded with new turf. At that point the fairways are closed to traffic for about six weeks or until the new turf has fully established and matured.



Fairways are closed to play during regrassing projects so new seedlings can establish and mature into a uniform and durable playing surface. In most northern locations, seeding is performed in late summer and fairways are opened to play the following spring or early summer.

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Disruption to play is perhaps the greatest downside of a regrassing project, and it is probably the reason why the program has not become more popular. Some disruption to play is inevitable, but it can be minimized through proper planning and some creativity. Completing the project in multiple phases may be one option to appease golfers, but there are other techniques that have been used successfully as well. The use of sod for fairway regrassing, though less common, is certainly an option available in northern climates where a very short golf season makes it less practical to renovate with seed. Again, where there is a will, there will be a way.

BEGIN WITH A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Not yet fully convinced of the merits of the project? Then consider introducing the concept using a smaller regrassing demonstration project. Demonstration plots can be initiated over a sizable fairway area where several different establishment techniques and turfgrasses can be used. The demonstration project is an inexpensive and less disruptive way to introduce golfers to the regrassing concept and the playing surfaces that are attainable. It can also be helpful to test specific cultivars, varietal blends, species mixtures, and renovation techniques before taking on a larger project.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that more golf facilities will begin to initiate regrassing programs to upgrade fairway surfaces that may currently be underperforming or are more costly to maintain due to inferior turfgrasses. Fairway regrassing offers the only real opportunity to eradicate outdated turfgrasses and replace them with newer, improved options that will better survive weather extremes and can be maintained using less water and pesticides. New turfgrass options play a major role in the solution to provide quality playing conditions long into the future. The turfgrasses are already here, and the road to successful surface renovation is easier than you think. The choice is yours. 



Finished product! A new stand of creeping bentgrass using varieties with genetics superior to older bentgrass options provides quality playing conditions and a surface more resistant to disease and cold temperature stress in northern climates.



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Changing Places

By Jake Schneider, LMD Production Manager, The Bruce Company

By the time that this article gets distributed, I will be a few weeks into my new position (listed above) at The Bruce Company. It all happened quite suddenly, and I would have never know of the job had it not been for an automatically-generated email from the website LinkedIn; that's how things work sometimes. As it has been since shortly before my 16th birthday, my name will still be on the payroll at a golf course, and I told Chad that his consolation for losing his assistant in the middle of summer is gaining a fairly well-qualified weekend employee.

For much of the past dozen or so years,

it has been my goal to become the superintendent at a high-caliber course in Wisconsin, and there were a few times that I was close to realizing that goal. But, the stars never did seem to align, and here I am. I can honestly say that I am not disappointed to be moving on and to have not reached this goal. While I have enjoyed working on golf courses, it's awfully tough to have a normal life in the summer. When you add in the fact that my wife works every other weekend as a nurse, finding time to getaway during the golf season has been nearly impossible.

When it came down to it, my decision to pursue and accept this position was as much about the increased responsibilities and salary as it was about a different lifestyle. Plus, I will still be able to get outside and use the knowledge of maintaining top-notch properties that I've hopefully accumulated through my years at North Shore and Blackhawk. I don't expect it to be a cakewalk and now have to manage 50 seasonal employees as opposed to 15 at Blackhawk. While there are some unknowns going into this new role, I believe that it will be a change for the better.

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Here's what I won't miss: handwatering when it's 95 degrees (or 70 degrees for that matter), worrying about grass dying in summer or winter or anytime in between, spraying, not leaving the Madison city limits from June-August, dealing with bunker washouts, hauling rollerbases to keep the rough from entering dormancy, and irrigation pump failures at 2 am.

On the flip side, here's what I will miss: providing golfers with a great golf course in spite of the obstacles that are faced, sunrises over Lake Mendota, Monday golf at a really nice courses, free golf balls, attending the Golf Industry show with some of the industry's finest (and Mike Bremmer), the Symposium, the immediate satisfaction that comes with a job well done, and working with a truly outstanding staff at Blackhawk.

Besides being a golf course superintendent, I always hoped that I would follow in the footsteps of my mentor, Monroe Miller, and serve as the WGCSA president and as the editor of The Grass Roots. Those plans are obviously on hold for now, but who knows what the future will bring. Two years ago, I never thought that I would be in the position that I am in now. Although I will likely not be a stranger to the association, I am grateful for the many outstanding individuals that I've had the chance to meet and to collaborate with, and my time serving as the assistant superintendent committee chairman and on the PAR 4 Research committee were not only rewarding, but they helped me grow as a professional.

As Tom Harrison said while accepting his distinguished service award at the Spring Business Meeting, please involve yourselves with the organizations and facilities that have made Wisconsin a vibrant state for turfgrass and its research. Without dedicated service and servitude, things can quickly change. Change, after all, is constant.



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State Amateur At The Bog

By David Brandenburg, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

The Bog in Saukville hosted the 112th Wisconsin State Amateur Championship July 22-25, 2013. The Arnold Palmer Design last hosted the "Amateur" in 2004 but considering most of the top finishers are under 25 they did not compete then.

The Bog will challenge the states best as it measures 7,221 yards from the back tees with a rating of 75.3 and slope of 143.

Wisconsin State Golf Association Director of Rules and Competitions Bill Linneman loves the ability to significantly change yardage on holes due to the multiple tee boxes and angles.

To enter the 72 hole stroke play event players need have a handicap index of 9.4 or less, be one of the approximately 41 exempt players or qualify at one of the 9 qualifying tournaments. Players must qualify in the district of their home course unless providing a good reason why they cannot do so. 168 players make the field with a cut after 36 holes to allow the top 70 players and ties to play for the championship.

Four days of championship play will provide for the true state champion and winner of the Sinnissippi Cup. The cup received its name from the first championship in 1901 when the amateur was played at Sinnissippi Country Club which is now the Janesville Country Club. While players compete for individual honors WSGA member clubs with three qualifiers compete for the Yule Cup awarded to the low club after the first 36 holes of play.



Teamwork is needed to host a big event as shown on the Par 4 5th hole. The hole plays 469 yards from the back tee.



The golf course borders the 1,600 acre Cedarburg Bog which has been designated a National Natural Landmark. It is the most intact bog in South Eastern Wisconsin and known for its expanses of cedar-tamarack swamp forests and 9 lakes.

2013 WSGA Amateur Championship Qualifying Sites

DISTRICT #1A: DRUGAN'S CASTLE MOUND CC, Holmen

DISTRICT #1B: EAU CLAIRE G&CC, Altoona

DISTRICT #2: LAKE ARROWHEAD GC (LAKES), Nekoosa

DISTRICT #3: EVERGREEN GC, Elkhorn

DISTRICT #4: REEDSBURG CC, Reedsburg

DISTRICT #5: RIDGEWAY G&CC, Neenah

DISTRICT #6A: HARTFORD GC, Hartford

DISTRICT #6B: NAGA-WAUKEE GC, Pewaukee

DISTRICT #6C: WHITNALL PARK GC, Hales Corners