

Too Little, Too Late

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Every year a number of construction projects are started much too late into fall to have any real chance of providing golfers a playable surface the following spring. Playing surfaces that are seeded after late September in the north central tier of states will be lucky to receive a mowing operation or two before the first snow. Yet, golfers who see complete turf cover from a distance usually expect a playable surface by Memorial Day. All too often the seeded green or tee is played before enough turf density develops to accommodate the wear and tear of day-to-day play. The end result is a poor quality product that disappoints everyone involved in the project - superintendent, golfers, architect, and builder.

It's amazing how optimistic some people can be regarding a reasonable cut-off date for establishing turf from seed. Every once in very long while, a project is

initiated well into fall and good growing weather persists into November. Spring arrives early, timely rainfall occurs, and the new green or fairway is good to go the following spring. However, for every success story there are numerous outright failures and many more examples of weak, thin surfaces that fail to provide consistent playing conditions. Too bad that the occasional success is remembered and the failures are forgotten or blamed on poor management.

Take the conservative approach when planning late season construction. For example, a bentgrass green or fairway needs to be seeded no later than mid-to-late August if an early June opening date is anticipated. The same goes for Kentucky bluegrass surfaces. In fact, bluegrass takes a week or two longer to germinate than bentgrass, and the slow rate of establishment needs to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, take into consideration that supplemental irrigation will not be available once the system is blown out. Severe moisture stress can occur on immature, shallow-rooted turf if droughty conditions occur during November and March - times when supplemental irrigation is typically unavailable.

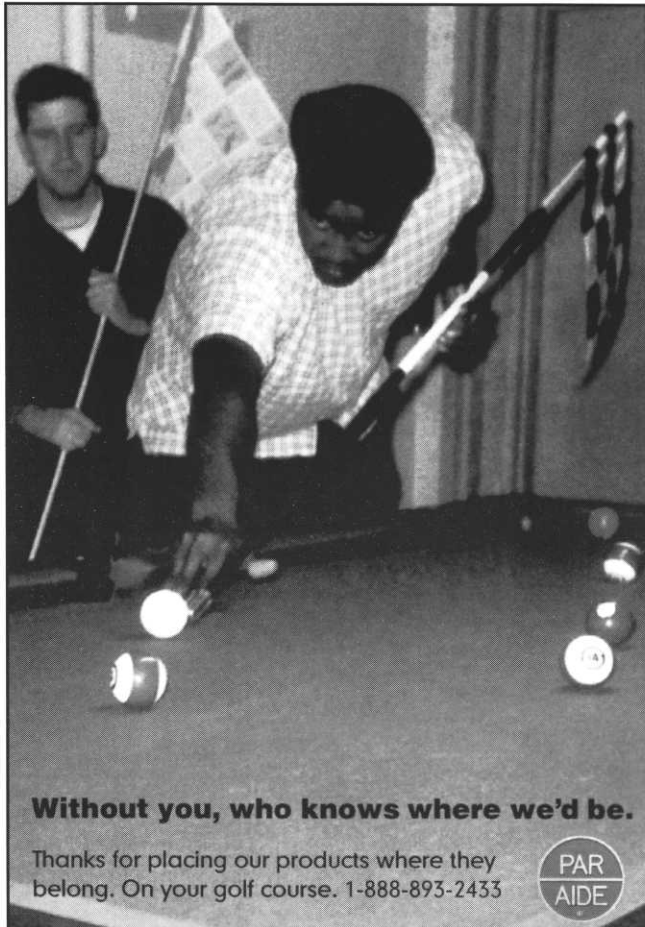
Don't always rely on sod to bail out a construction project that is compromised by bad weather or other delays. Kentucky bluegrass sod tolerates a late installation date relatively well, but keeping the sod watered can be a challenge without a steady supply of automatic irrigation during early spring. In addition, the concerns regarding the management of sodded greens vs. seeded greens can be a topic of another entire update.

True, weather generally dictates the pace of any golf course construction project. Consequently, hope for the best, but expect and plan for some weather delays. A little more down time in fall outweighs a lot of down time the following spring. Plan to have the project seeded by the appropriate date and you won't be making promises to the golfers you have little chance of keeping.

As a difficult season comes to a close, it's time to begin planning to attend the always popular and educational Wisconsin Symposium. This year's Symposium will take place on November 13th and 14th at a new and exciting venue - the American Club in Kohler, Wisconsin. Feel free to contact the Wisconsin office at 262-797-8743 for registration information.

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