



Poa annua putting surfaces can provide excellent playability, in spite of their questionable reputation among some golfers.

SOMETIMES *POA ANNUA* IS THE ANSWER

BY LARRY GILHULY | AGRONOMIST, WEST REGION

“Excellent smoothness and perfect pace for those heavily contoured greens.”

“The ball reaction is slightly softer, but the greens are still very firm and smooth.”

“The greens were spectacular. Thanks for the change.”

The above comments were heard from several golfers that recently played the newly regrassed putting greens at Chambers Bay. It may surprise golfers to find out that the new, smooth greens at Chambers Bay are now entirely *Poa annua*, and that for many courses in the U.S. this grass is not undesirable at all. In fact, *Poa annua* can thrive at extremely low mowing heights in certain areas.

The putting greens at Chambers Bay were originally seeded with a combination of fine fescue and a small percentage of colonial bentgrass. Smooth, firm and good pace were some of the descriptions heard

about the putting greens during the early years. However, from the beginning, the control of *Poa annua* was a critical program due to the different growth characteristics and the undesirable creation of seedheads. Seedhead control can be obtained using different growth regulators, but fine fescues do not react well to these materials. Thus, as the 2015 U.S Open arrived, several greens were not as smooth as desired.

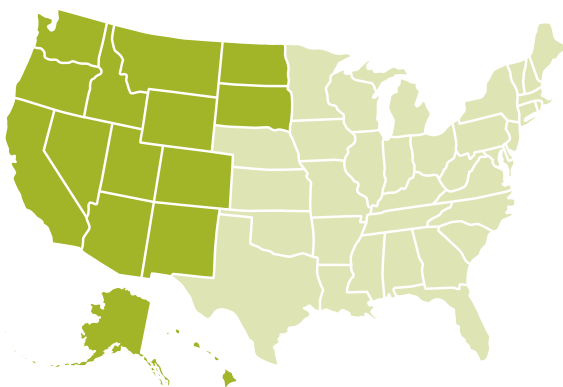
After the championship, it was decided the mowing heights needed to stay down to create smoother putting surfaces. This resulted in a rapid increase in *Poa annua*, which left the facility with a decision to either go through several years of transition or simply resod the greens with *Poa annua*. The county that owns Chambers Bay and their management company chose to forego the multiyear transition from fescue and colonial bentgrass and resod to *Poa annua*. Four greens were resodded in 2017 and the remaining greens were completed last fall.

The course was closed on October 1, 2018, and reopened in early April, 2019, with nothing but positive comments about the regrassed putting greens. As the putting greens continue to mature, they will perform much better than the original blend of fine fescues due to their ability to withstand traffic year-round and the adaptation of *Poa annua* to the local climate. Finally, the issue of seedhead production can now be addressed with growth regulators that will not be harmful to the *Poa annua*. This is just one example where *Poa annua* is the answer.



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