

A survival guide to golf course 'grow-in'

Early involvement heads off big problems later, say two Illinois superintendents.

■ Establishing turf on a new golf course causes superintendents to question the wisdom of their career choice. But superintendents Donald Ferreri and Steve Mulvey survived the process, and offer some tips, hoping that their experiences shed some light to help others through construction and grow-in.

Getting the turfgrass up and playable is what rings the cash register for course owners and developers.



Mulvey says slopes can be hard to establish.

Ferreri heads maintenance of Seven Bridges Golf Club, a high-end public course, in Woodridge, near Chicago. Mulvey is superintendent at Panther Creek

Country Club down state in Springfield. Both supervised grow-ins at their courses.

That they're both gainfully employed and—judging from the presentations they gave at the North Central Turf Expo—reasonably happy is proof that their efforts were satisfactory.

To that, Ferreri and Mulvey give equal credit to unusually fine fall Illinois weather back several seasons ago when they supervised the grow-ins, and to being a part of decision-making teams at their courses before bulldozers started snorting.

"Getting a superintendent on the site as early as possible, before the heavy equipment arrives, allows the superintendent to see everything when it goes in the ground, to know what's there," says Ferreri. It also gives the super a better understanding—and, often, input—concerning such matters as drainage, shade and air circulation.

(Actually, because of political and jurisdictional squabbles, Ferreri was on the Seven Bridges project almost two years

before construction was allowed to begin.)

Mulvey says a superintendent must pay special attention to proper drainage, otherwise "it will come back and haunt you."

Apart from being a part of the decision-making team early in construction, the super must earn the cooperation of engineers, contractors, equipment operators, and, particularly, his own staff.

Says Mulvey, "Everybody has to get along. It's critical." He praises assistant Bill Smith. "I really appreciate him. A good assistant is vital in any project."

Here are some other tips the two supers offered:

✓ **Don't allow** equipment operators to drive over and compact the same areas continuously. Or to pile gravel, rip rap or other debris by the fairways, tees or greens.

✓ **Complete all** work requiring the use of heavy equipment before seeding.

✓ **Make sure** the contours built into the course are easily mowable after grow-in.

✓ **Test soils** during construction. This will help build a fertility program.

✓ **Have irrigation** installed and functioning prior to seeding.

✓ **Install cart paths** prior to seeding. It saves disruption to your course later, and allows you and your staff to get around the course and check your satellite boxes, etc.

✓ **Consider laying** sod "runways" from the cart path the shortest distance to tees



First hole a classic in only Seven Bridges Golf Club's second season.

and greens to allow access for you and your mowers during grow-in.

✓ **Check nearby** universities, seed suppliers, and even fellow superintendents for insights on grasses best for your course.

✓ **Seed greens, tees and fairways** at half rates, then seed again with another half rate criss-crossing the first seeding. This allows for more even and thorough establishment.

✓ **Add quick couplers** to the irrigation system while it's accessible, while trenches are open. About 65 were installed at Seven Bridges during construction.

✓ **Have a plan** to protect all trees that you want to save.

✓ **Budget adequate labor.** A mechanical rock remover gets the larger rocks, but the smaller ones will have to be collected from the fairways by hand. Seven Bridges used maybe a dozen laborers for about a week. Mulvey says greens may need some hand weeding, too.

✓ **To avoid vandalism,** try to have the golf course fenced.

Mulvey says Panther Creek greens and tees were seeded with Penncross while Pennway was used on fairways. August through mid-September is a good time to seed in Springfield, but Mulvey says his seeding dates got pushed back later in the season.

Ferreri seeded roughs at Seven Bridges with a Brillion seeder and a mixture of perennial ryegrass, Kentucky bluegrasses and fescues. The Manhattan II and Citation II ryegrasses came up first and held the soil, while the bluegrasses finally started



Ferreri coaxed new course to look like an 'established' course.

'Get on site, before the heavy equipment arrives, to know what's there.'

—Donald Ferreri
Seven Bridges G.C.

taking over with the fescues doing better on the slopes. Tees got Penncross seed with Pennlinks for the greens, both applied with a Milorganite carrier. The fairways are Penneagle.

At the time of seeding, he reports that he also used a starter fertilizer and a granular fungicide to control damping off. "I think that was very worthwhile," says Ferreri.

—Ron Hall



Aerial view shows that holes 2, 3 and 5 are challenging and green at Seven Bridges.

Height of cut, turf accessories keys to greens management

These experienced greens experts use turf rollers, groomers and specially-blended topdressing mixes.

■ Whether you're managing greens for tournament play, the daily club membership or the general public, the goal is the same: a quality putting surface, as free as possible of disease and other turf maladies.

Here are some tips on greens care, from leading superintendents, as presented at the last Ohio Turf Conference.

Bob Brame, USGA agronomist and ex-superintendent:

"Successful greens management depends on the quality of the turf foundation you've established in preparation for day-to-day maintenance."

Brame believes a good turf foundation includes:

- a suitable growing environment;
- height of cut;
- fertility programs; and
- water management.

"With mowing height, you've got to draw the line. $\frac{3}{8}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch or higher is a better growing environment," says Brame. "The shorter the turfgrass, the more likely it is that *Poa annua* will become a problem."

Brame also believes that fans are valuable for lowering leaf blade temperature.

Brame is in step with the recent trend to walking mowers. "They require more time," he admits, "but result in better playability."

Rollers? Don't push it, he says. You don't have to cut the greens as close when using rollers, but some superintendents do both. Know the limitations of the specific green.

When it comes to fertility programs, remember, says Brame, that a well fed turf system will be more resistant to disease.

Tom Walker, superintendent at the Inverness Club, Toledo, Ohio:

Walker manages 62,000 sq. ft. of putting surfaces. His greens endure more than 28,000 rounds every season, so Walker has learned to treat each green individually.

The maintenance season begins in late August. Soluble forms of nitrogen are used to get the turf ready for fall and winter.

Aerification is done in the fall, and crews Verti-Drain two or three times each year, usually in mid-late October and mid-late November. A Toro Hydroject water aerator is used at one- to three-week intervals.

Walker goes easy on spring fertilization. In summer, a slow-release product is applied to avoid burning and flush growth.

Walker uses a special 80-20 topdressing mix that's blended off-site.

"We try to apply topdressing on

Monday, at a rate of one to three cubic feet per 1000 sq. ft. Once we've applied it, we sweep it with tennis court brooms, to get it into the aeration holes."

Traffic management is conducted at three to four prime pin spots on each green, and Walker picks the location each day. To keep green speed consistent, he makes sure it stimps between 10.3 and 10.6—11 for tournaments.

"We mow 7 to 10 times a week, roll the greens four times each week," he notes. "We try to balance the fertility program, and try not to focus on one element."

Randy Boudinot, superintendent at Country Club of the North, Dayton, Ohio:

He applies topdressing twice each month during summer. In spring, it's three times each month.

In the summer, an 80/20 topdressing mix is applied at a rate of 2 cu. ft. per 1000 sq. ft.

"We walk the greens when we mow, and five of the mowers have turf groomers, which we use two to three times a week. The groomers are usually set at half the mowing height. They add a nice touch, and turf groomers make it easier to increase green speed."

Brushes are used once, sometimes twice a week.

Boudinot plans ahead, and works out weekly and monthly maintenance programs. And get your staff involved as much as possible, Boudinot says.

"They do a better job when I get them involved. Let them know what you want to accomplish."

—Terry McIver