

Define fairways with a little bit of 'color'

When fairways and roughs are both Penncross, you have to take unusual measures to separate them visually.

■ Vince Bracken has fairways to die for. The golf course superintendent at Fairmount Country Club in Chatham, N.J. maintains a 95 percent Penncross bentgrass course, including roughs and intermediate areas. He finds the turf is relatively low maintenance and extremely pleasing to look at.



Vince Bracken with one of his newly-defined fairways in the background. Note distinct color difference between fairway and cut rough.

"Our fairways are some of the best in the state," says Bracken, who became superintendent at Fairmount in 1989. "Penncross has very few problems with insects and diseases and offers the best playing surface you can find. Golfers just love hitting the ball of it."

Hal Purdy designed the north-central New Jersey course in 1960 to incorporate moderate undulations and "fall-away" greens. Cupping areas comprise only about 40 percent of the 6,000-sq. ft. greens, with the remaining area gently sloping down into the fairways. "It's a difficult but fair course," notes Bracken.

Except for the lack of definition between fairways and roughs, Bracken had no major complaints about the course when he took the job. Contour effects remain defined between fairways, greens and tees because of the different cutting heights. But Penncross appears "puffy and uneven" when grown at higher cuts, says Bracken. "Early in the spring, we lost the contour between our fairways and roughs," he adds. "Golfers couldn't tell where the fairway left off and the rough began."

Dramatic distinctions—In 1990, Bracken

started correcting the problem. He decided to convert his roughs to an 80/20 bluegrass/rye mixture, but wanted to start with a dramatic distinction in the intermediate areas. He chose to chemically burn off a 20-foot collar around the fairways before seeding with his 80/20 mixture. Then he planned to overseed on the remaining rough.

"I was looking for a product that would give me a quick kill and quick seeding time. I knew Roundup would take too long to show results, and I couldn't get back in to seed right away. My distributor recommended a new herbicide that was still under an Experimental Use Permit."

Bracken sprayed what has become known as Finale (EPA registration came in late 1993) at 4 quarts in 60 gallons of water per acre. Applications were made on the fifth, sixth and eighth roughs in 1990. Twenty-four hours after the application, he aerated, verticutted and seeded. He also applied 1½ lb. N/1,000 sq. ft. Within 48 hours, the turf was yellowing; within three days, it was dead. Within 10 days, Bracken saw germination. He then cut in the blue-rye mixture on the outer rough areas.

No wait—"Those roughs look terrific now, and the membership loves looking down from an elevated tee and seeing the nice, dark green color against the lighter-colored fairway," Bracken says. "Seeing the results so fast helped the membership grasp what we were trying to do. Using Finale let us get the project completed quickly, which is very important in today's golf industry. Golfers don't like to hear that they have to wait."

In five years, Bracken has converted four other roughs to the blue-rye mixture. He expects to complete all rough conversions by 1996.

On the border

■ "We have the distinction of bordering, on two sides of the course, a 6,000-acre National Wildlife Refuge called the Great Swamp," says Vince Bracken. "Because the five ponds on our course drain into the swamp, I don't treat them at all. I have a company that comes in strictly to maintain the ponds. But we have to be extra careful about pesticide applications."

Fairmount's Penncross turf allows Bracken to reduce pesticide use. He remains on a preventive disease program. He makes one pre-emergence weed control application and has isolated insect problems. He feeds the turf throughout the season.

Bracken applies a blend including Nutralene controlled-release nitrogen every four weeks on fairways, and every two weeks on greens. "We don't like to see spurts of growth, so I like the sus-

tained-release products," he says.

To keep thatch low, Bracken aerates fairways and greens once or twice a year and verticuts in the fall before winter sets in. After aerifying greens, he drags the material back into the holes, blows off excess thatch, applies seed, drags it in, and fertilizes with 1 1/2 lb. N/1,000 sq. ft.

In extreme heat and exceptionally cold weather in 1993 and 1994, the Penncross fared extremely well. "We hand-watered greens during hot weather, but did not have to syringe," explains Bracken. "Our well water stays at 52 degrees, so that helps cool things down. But during the bad winter last year, I didn't even take the ice off our greens. They were healthy, elevated and well-drained, so I didn't worry about them."