

Rolling Out The Carpet

A last-resort measure that is now a routine part of practice tee management.

BY JOHN FOY

Every region of the country has its own set of course and turf management concerns or issues to deal with. In Florida, we are at a big disadvantage because for the vast majority of clubs and courses, the primary play season is winter, when the base bermudagrass turf cover is in a semi- to fully dormant stage. With a large influx of people escaping the cold weather of the north, golf courses get very crowded. While we typically enjoy very mild winter weather, the base turf cover of Florida golf courses is in a semi- to fully dormant phase in response to cool temperatures and reduced day length, which impacts aesthetics, wear tolerance, and divot recovery during the peak play season.

Overseeding of putting greens, tees, and fairways has been a standard practice at courses in North and Central Florida. In South Florida, even though the bermudas do not go fully dormant, overseeding has been a growing trend.

Obviously, when the base bermuda is not actively growing, recovery from divot damage is not going to occur, either. Practice range tees are routinely overseeded in the fall, and then periodic reseedings are often conducted in an effort to maintain a turf cover. Yet, with constant and heavy use during the peak winter season, it is difficult to schedule time to work on range tees. Supplemental irrigation for good seedling establishment is also very difficult. During the middle to latter stages of the winter season, a common complaint heard from golfers is having to hit off thin, juvenile turf and sand.

The Bonita Bay Club in Bonita Springs, Florida, has been one of the most successful real estate developments in Southwest Florida. A couple of years ago the practice tee had become so heavily divoted that Mark Hampton, Director of Course Operations, decided that resodding was the only option. As a result of good experience with this program, *rolling out the carpet* has been incorporated into the routine winter-time maintenance program. In the fall, as the members begin returning from the North and activity on the range begins to build up, the hitting line is restricted to the back half of the tee. This setup is maintained through the holiday season, when extremely heavy member and guest activity occurs. Then, in early January, the front half of the tee is brought into use and the back of the tee is closed. At this point, a commercial grade sod cutter is brought in and used to remove all of the remaining turf from the back portion of

the tee. This is followed by surface preparation using laser leveling and fill soil work as needed, and then big roll sod is installed. The resodded portion of the tee is kept closed for a week or two so that the turf can become rooted.

Mark Hampton pointed out that *thick cut* sod works best and is less likely to slip or get dislodged before the roots have had a chance to fully establish.

Resodding approximately 20,000 square feet of tee surface is not inexpensive, but the cost is considered to be worthwhile at Bonita Bay. The golfers are provided a much better quality tee surface through the remainder of the winter season. Also, with sodding, a more mature turf condition results so that the golfers do not feel as if they are constantly hitting out of sand and a thin ryegrass turf. Furthermore, significantly less water and fertilizer must be used after resodding compared to being in a constant grow-in process. I know that, at least in Florida, I visit very few courses that have practice tees large enough to handle heavy activity throughout the winter season. This is especially true with the growing popularity of annual range ball programs and unlimited access to balls. Thus, if maintaining a turf cover on the practice tee has been a major battle, you might want to consider *rolling out the carpet*.

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Thick cut, big roll bermudagrass sod is used to re-grass the back half of the practice tee. Rolling out the carpet on the practice tee has proven to be the best option for accommodating the golfers.