

# Using Your Head and the Golfers' Feet for Better Grass on Small Tees

by **STANLEY J. ZONTEK**

Director, Mid-Atlantic Region, USGA Green Section

“THIS TEE is simply too small to handle the traffic it receives” is a commonly used explanation for why turf is in poor condition on a particular tee. This problem is especially common on public golf courses which typically receive heavy play and on private golf courses which receive nearly the same amount of traffic. In some parts of the country, this small tee/heavy play problem is made less severe by growing aggressive grasses, such as bermudagrass, in combination with overseeding in the fall with perennial ryegrasses.

In areas where bermudagrass cannot be used, however, golf course superintendents must rely on periodic reseedings to maintain some type of grass cover on small tees. Unfortunately, this practice is rarely successful in the Transition Zone, where crabgrass and goosegrass thrive in the summer. Nor-

mally, tees begin the season with a good stand of grass due to overseeding the previous fall and the use of temporary tees during the winter. A preemerge herbicide is routinely applied during the spring to control crabgrass and goosegrass. Regrettably, preemerge herbicides do not distinguish between germinating weed grass seeds and turfgrass seeds, so most reseedings into treated tees usually result in a poor catch. Besides, goosegrass tends to germinate in the divots. Needless to say, trying to grow a good stand of weed-free grass on small, heavily used tees in the Transition Zone has been an exercise in futility . . . until now.

Following is a tip on how to break this cycle. It is the result of several ideas coming together, two derived from science and one from common sense. In years past, golf courses lacked a truly effective and safe postemerge herbicide

for crabgrass and goosegrass control, but this changed with the introduction of Acclaim. This product seems to have a particularly wide margin of safety on perennial ryegrasses, giving the golf course superintendent the option of using postemerge instead of preemerge herbicides for crabgrass and goosegrass control. This program also reduces the total amount of chemicals applied to the soil.

The next step is to look at another product of science, the turf-type perennial ryegrasses. Ryegrasses exhibit extraordinary seedling vigor and can germinate and develop a stand of grass far more quickly than creeping bentgrasses, Kentucky bluegrasses, or fescues.

The perennial ryegrasses also are some of the toughest and most wear-resistant turfgrasses available. Once established, they handle foot traffic

*Reseeding to perennial ryegrass.*



better and can sometimes recover from divoting due to their deep crowns. They also are quite tolerant of close mowing, producing good-to-excellent turf quality even under heavy traffic.

The next step is establishment. Though various overseeding equipment can be used, including aerators, slicers, and seeders, Mr. Lou Rudinski, golf course superintendent of the Eisenhower Golf Course in Annapolis, Maryland, uses an interesting and common-sense approach in overseeding his tees. Periodically during the year he simply broadcasts seed on his non-preemerge tees and lets the foot traffic of the golfers push the seed into contact with the soil, where it germinates and grows. It sounds so simple, yet it works very well!

Following is a general outline of his tee management program:

1. Tees are routinely aerated, sliced, and seeded in the fall using perennial

ryegrass blends (selected for their performance in Maryland) at a rate of 10 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft.

Tees are maintained at  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch cutting height.

A total of about 5 lbs. of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. as a complete fertilizer is applied during the growing season. Most of the fertilizer is applied in the fall, with lighter applications made during May and June, and light applications of a soluble material are put down during the summer months.

2. The tees are reseeded at a rate of 4 to 5 lbs. of perennial ryegrass seed per 1,000 sq. ft., approximately 4 to 5 times per season. The larger tees usually receive less seed, and the more heavily used par-3 tees are reseeded more frequently and/or receive more seed. The seed is broadcast over the surface and the golfers' traffic presses it into the soil.

3. The irrigation program is not altered for the sake of the seeding work. The perennial ryegrasses seem to germinate just fine using normal irrigation cycles, without the need to overwater the tees.

4. Normally, two applications of Acclaim at the lightest labeled rate normally controls any crabgrass or goosegrass that may develop.

In the fall, the cycle begins again with step 1.

Briefly, the Eisenhower Golf Course receives more than 50,000 rounds of golf per year. The tees are small, but as a result of this program, they now have grass on them. Mr. Rudinski and his staff have put a number of different ideas together to create a successful program. They used their heads and the golfers' feet to help them grow grass on their small tees.

*Success! Grass on a small tee can be maintained with proper management.*

