

Drawing The Line on Winter Play

Marking fairways with borderlines of dye helps define fairways for "winter rules."

by JAMES F. MOORE

WHILE THE Rules of Golf call for everyone to *play the ball as it lies*, a great many golfers play courses on which good lies are as rare as double eagles. Bad lies are particularly frequent on southern courses when the bermudagrass enters dormancy following the first freeze. As a result, many golfers in the South adopt a vague set of *rules* for winter play that usually involve *bumping* the ball to a better place. Depending on the leniency of their playing partners (also known as opponents), the bump may be as little as six inches or as much as a club's length.

Since *winter rules* are an obvious direct violation of the Rules of Golf, the more scrupulous golf memberships attempt to retain some measure of compliance by stipulating the ball can only be bumped in the fairway. However, what seems like a reasonable requirement can become a source of hard feelings when players (especially opponents) cannot determine whether the ball that is to be bumped lies in the fairway or the rough. Making such a determination is often impossible on dormant bermudagrass, particularly on those golf courses where it is sometimes difficult to tell rough from fairway, even in the summer.

The high-tech solution to this problem is to overseed bermudagrass fairways with perennial ryegrass in the fall. Brown, dormant bermudagrass, covered by a dense stand of ryegrass, provides some of the most beautiful scenes in golf. Unfortunately, overseeding is expensive. In addition to the cost of the seed (approximately \$400 per acre), funds must be provided for year-round mowing, fertilization, and irrigation. However, the most significant

cost may be damage to the bermudagrass. Low mowing of ryegrass fairways in the fall and winter predisposes the bermudagrass to winter injury. Then, competition between the ryegrass and bermudagrass in the spring limits the ability of the bermudagrass to recover quickly.

Bentgrass greens can be seriously affected by fairway overseeding as well. When bermudagrass fairways are overseeded, neither pre-emergence nor post-emergence herbicides can be used to control *Poa annua* in the overseeded acreage. As *Poa annua* flourishes in the fairways, some of the seed produced is invariably tracked into the greens.

Terry Stephenson, golf course superintendent of Western Oaks Country Club in Waco, Texas, uses a simple and inexpensive method to define winter fairways. Using his spray equipment, he outlines the fairways with green dye. The width of the band of green dye can be adjusted simply by turning off two

or three booms. A further adjustment can be made by capping additional nozzles on the one functioning boom, leaving a single nozzle functional. Approximately 25 gallons of the water and dye mixture provides enough material to outline all 18 fairways. It takes less than two hours to treat the entire course, and the dyed areas remain well defined for two weeks or more, depending on how much rain is received.

In addition to eliminating the confusion over *winter rules*, this simple idea makes the course more enjoyable to play during the winter, since the fairways are so much better defined for the golfers hitting their tee shots. The dye also can be used to define target areas on the driving range (for ranges that do not have target greens).

One caution is in order. It is tempting to dye the entire fairway and provide green playing surfaces at a much-reduced cost when compared to the expense of overseeding. Unfortunately,

today's dyes are much more colorfast than those used in the past, and golf shoes, early morning dew, and dye do not go well together. The money you saved on overseeding might well go into buying new shoes for your *dewweepers* (the early morning players). By confining the dyed area to a small strip at the interface of the fairway and rough, damage to the player's shoes is extremely unlikely.

Sometimes the simplest and least-expensive ideas are the best. Give this one a try.

Using a sprayer with all but one nozzle closed, a green line can be painted around the edge of all fairway boundaries.



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