

Course Update 5/15/10

Dear Berkshire Hills Members,

Below are a couple inputs we have recently received from the USGA plus a response to a frequently asked question. So as not to confuse you, my inputs (Mike) are in black and the USGA inputs are in red

Each week I receive updates from the USGA greens section. These updates are written by USGA agronomists about their respective region of the country as to what they are seeing at golf courses in their area. Below (in red) is the latest update for the Northeast region:

"The weather always seems to jump around some in the spring, and it certainly is doing that this year! Long johns have been traded for sun block and vice versa a couple of times already this year, and that always makes for an interesting start to the season. Golfers have been out in droves on many courses, and their early start has made it challenging to get the last of the spring cleanup accomplished. Despite the unseasonably warm temperatures we have experienced at times, there have been plenty of cold snaps, and some areas still are experiencing some frost. Playing conditions in the Northeast Region probably won't round into peak form for a few more weeks.

When golfers experience a few warm days, they start to expect better playing conditions. A few warm days followed by cold weather, and possibly frost, gives golfers the perception that things should be growing, but the annual bluegrass (poa) and the bentgrasses won't grow consistently under these conditions. Here are a few things you can expect for the next couple of weeks:

- **Bentgrass is very prone to mechanical injury during the spring season, and even normal mowing and rolling operations may cause visible injury to bentgrass while temperatures remain cool.**
- **With sporadic cool periods and even a few frosts, certain bentgrass cultivars become severely discolored. It may look like a disease, but more often than not, the discoloration is just a result of the cool temperatures, possibly combined with some mechanical injury.**
- **Poa/bent putting greens will remain somewhat bumpy until the growth of the two species evens out, and this won't happen until we experience consistently warm temperatures. For warmer, more southerly areas, this may be occurring right now. For cooler areas, this may not occur for another month.**

Regardless of how effective your seed head suppression program worked, a few seed heads, (maybe quite a few) often pop up, and these will contribute to the bumpy conditions."

It should be known that Berkshire Hills is not immune to what is going on with the weather. We had 3 very hard frosts this past week, 2 days of rain, and not much sunshine. When we do get the small surges of good grass growing weather, which has been rare, we get some excellent growth. Just look how for the greens have come since we first opened for play. Below is a link you can look at which a lot of Northeastern superintendents took part in a survey on Poa damage:

<http://survey.constantcontact.com/survey/a07e2vctsnlq8kgitb3/results>

USGA Visit to BHCC

We recently had the USGA come in to visit BHCC. The USGA provides a Turf Advisory Service (TAS) to all its member clubs. It is something we have at BHCC has used in the past. The Northeast

Region USGA agronomist, who has done hundreds of these visits, comes in provides advice on turf and golf course issues. Our time with them was mainly focused on what happened to the greens, recovery, and future prevention. The USGA provided a very detailed report, below (in red) is a summary of their report. The Course Tour was conducted on April 22. As you read thru the summary you'll see that their assessment of the cause of the damage and their path for recovery is very much in-line with the our assessment and the path we have already taken. The USGA also provided some recommendations for long term prevention which will be addressed in the coming months.

The Focus of the USGA Turf Advisory Service (TAS) visit was to examine the damaged greens and determine what and when the cold temperature injury occurred and to develop strategies to hopefully reduce/eliminate its occurrence in the future. We also examined the soil profiles in most of the greens.

Cause

The greens have sizable populations of annual bluegrass (poa) with the exception of the two newer bentgrass practice greens. Annual bluegrass is a common grass throughout New England and has a number of positive attributes including its ability to provide a quality playing surface under ideal conditions. However, the Achilles Heel of annual bluegrass is its inability to tolerate extreme temperatures (both cold and heat) and disease. A look at both practice greens helps to illustrate this point with the creeping bentgrass on those greens having survived the winter weather in excellent condition compared to annual bluegrass. I believe that this season's damage was initiated in late January when the region experienced a period of warm temperatures and heavy rains. The rains saturated the soils and removed much of our snow. The grasses became hydrated during that event and then several days later were subjected to temperatures at or near zero, which is well below lethal for most annual bluegrass. The creeping bentgrass can tolerate those lower temperatures and the untimely hydration and was not injured. The water absorbed by the plants freezes within and around the cells, causing physical injury in the crown portion. The grass seemingly was alive in early March but soon declined with the advent of warmer temperatures. This was the case at a number of golf courses. We also believe that much of the annual bluegrass, was damaged and thus more susceptible to the drying winds and freeze/thaw cycle that reoccurred later in March.

Recovery

The main concern at this point is recovering the damaged greens. Fortunately, there were signs of germination from earlier seeding work. Annual bluegrass that appeared damaged earlier is also showing signs of recovery with the more mild weather conditions. This is most fortunate at least in the short-term and is what is allowing most of the greens to remain open to play. The most severely damaged greens continue to have temporary greens and that is recommended to allow the seeded areas some time to establish without the negative effects of traffic. Additional seeding work is required especially on more severely damaged greens.

The triplex mower used to maintain the green should be equipped with smooth rollers and those rollers used until we have obtained full turf cover. Shoot growth will become dense as a result of maintaining the greens at the higher height of cut, the use of smoother rollers and added fertility. Topdress the greens on a 2-3 week interval during the recovery to protect the crowns of the new seedling plants and provide smoother and better ball roll for the golfers. It is also important to take a more conservative management approach while the juvenile turf plants continue to establish and mature. Mowing heights will be lowered gradually in

increments and ideally would be done so in conjunction with topdressing practices that would help to protect the young plants from mowing.

Prevention

Preventing winter freeze injury is perhaps the biggest challenge that faces golf course superintendents in northern regions of the country. We discussed the attributes of creeping bentgrass earlier and its ability to tolerate much lower temperatures as compared to annual bluegrass. Increasing bentgrass populations is therefore a primary objective for most northern golf courses and especially those where the greens are prone to this type of injury. A successful recovery will help increase the populations of creeping bentgrass on the surfaces.

Recommendations

- **Use of winter protection covers with the objective of trying to keep the turf from becoming hydrated during the winter season for those greens where winter injury occurs more frequently.**
- **Reviewed green sites where shade continues to impact the turf. Suggested eliminating a number of trees where shade is impacting turf growth and health.**
- **A more aggressive core cultivation and topdressing program is required for the greens to reduce the organic accumulation. A hollow tine core cultivation should be planned for August using a ½ " hollow tine to pull a core that can be backfilled with a good quality sand.**
- **Continue to use solid spiking tines on the greens through the season to keep the surfaces open.**
- **The greens will benefit from a more regular and frequent light sand topdressing program.**

Frequently Asked Question

One question I have been asked recently is "How come we are not or have not pulled cores from the greens right now." Simple answer: This would be counter-productive right now. Remember our poa got set back from the poor weather conditions which you have been reading about and poa has very short roots. Yes we can use the aerifier to punch a solid hole, but when you put a hollow tine on shallow rooted grass it tears things up. Aerification now or two weeks ago would only set things back further. We have quite a bit of new bent seed popping and it would not be a good move to go and remove it which aerifying would do. When we aerify in August (weather pending) I will be using a larger tine, with closer spacing, thus pulling more thatch out then, seeding and heavily topdressing. In August the grass will be strong enough to take the stress of the entire aerification process. In the meantime I am following the suggestions of the USGA and what I feel is right. As the plants mature I will be able to do some grooming, as well as more frequent mowing and rolling.

I would like to thank many of you for your support during this difficult time with our greens situation. It really helps knowing most of you have a good positive attitude about the future of our greens. I know I

do. I will see you on the course.

Mike Salinetti

5/9/10

Dear Berkshire Hills Members,

I just wanted to let everyone know that on Monday we will be lightly topdressing the greens. This practice of light and frequent topdressing is something we must get back into doing here at BHCC. Most of you won't even notice when we do this, as it is just a very light coating of sand, which we then water in. All 18 greens are now open and improving on a daily basis. We still are not getting consistent enough temperatures for the growth of the poa to speed up to that of the bent, thus causing some bumpy conditions. Today is extremely cool and it looks like we may have a frost tonight. Hopefully things will start to warm up so we can get the greens the way we expect them to be.

Mike

May 2, 2010

It finally looks as if some warm days and nights are here to stay for a while. The main concern at BHCC right now is the health of the greens. We are down to only 3 temporary greens right now and if the weather cooperates it should not be too long before all 18 greens are open. If you have been playing the course for the last month you can see that there has been significant growth on the greens. Berkshire Hills has not been alone with damage to poa on greens throughout the Northeast. A lot of us are fighting the same battle right now by doing as much as we can to promote the growth of new bentgrass seed as well as the poa. The poa across the Northeast region was damaged as a result of crown hydration during the freeze and thaw periods occurring at the end of January as well as at the end of March. April was certainly not the best month weather wise when it comes to growing new grass. We had many nights with heavy frosts, however we did have some nice days which helped to get the soil temperatures up a little and got some grass growing. I have included some pictures of greens which show how they have progressed throughout the last month. Although still far from perfect, today's pictures look much better than 1 month ago and things are only progressing more and more each day.

11 Green April 1, 2010



11 Green May 2



12 Green April 1



12 Green May 2



14 Green April 1



14 Green May 2



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