



Going Under Covers

By Peter Hinsperger

Three covers blanket the entire football field at Mile High Stadium in Denver. Photos courtesy Hinsperger Poly Industries, Ltd., Evergreen covers supplied by Covermaster, Inc.

Since the early 1980s, *pressure* has been the name of the game for golf course and athletic field superintendents. Play on most golf courses and athletic fields has increased dramatically. Weather patterns have changed. Northern regions are getting much less protective snow cover. Many southern regions are getting more intense cold periods with killing frosts. Government restrictions have increased on the use and types of chemicals, as well as reduced water use. Construction and maintenance costs are rising.

With these and other problems facing the turf industry, those involved must utilize every tool available to deliver the best product possible at a cost that will not attack profit margins.

Covers are one such tool. Various fabrics for protecting turf were initially experimented with in the 1960s. Many



Outfield cover application at Pilot Field in Buffalo, NY.

of these fabrics worked, but "side" costs, such as installation time, and replacement and disposal costs, made the concept of covers unfeasible.

Negative attitudes toward covers were also an important element in their early experimental failures. Covers did not conform with then current management techniques of golf courses and athletic fields.

Over the years, however, it was proven that covers worked. Still, the challenge of developing covers without side costs and application inconveniences remained. Plus, they had to be versatile—they had to work in various climatic conditions, from northern Canada to the southern United States.

Today's products were developed for the turf industry through input from turf specialists and universities, as well as improved manufacturing technology.

The benefits of proper covers are many. Regardless, of their application, they save money and time in areas such as:

1. Earlier Openings—Courses closed during the winter months can be ready up to two or three weeks sooner in the spring. In these applications, covers

Transparent covers also create a greenhouse effect, which accelerates root development and protects the plant from shock that occurs during the spring periods of "freeze-thaw" cycles. This is why they are used in many southern regions for frost protection.

protect the greens from wind or ice desiccation, while reducing the damage caused by foot traffic during the winter. The cost of spring cleanup is also drastically reduced because the covers shield the surface from debris while remaining clean themselves. Transparent covers also create a greenhouse effect, which accelerates root development and protects the plant from shock that occurs during the spring periods of "freeze-thaw" cycles. This is why they are used in many southern regions for frost protection. Winter application protection benefits include increased revenues from earlier openings, reduced costs in opening preparation, and reduced risks of turf destruction posed by vandalism, animals, or abnormal weather conditions.

2. New Construction—New sports fields and golf courses must be constructed quickly and within budget. Covers accelerate seed germination while reducing seed loss due to rain or wind erosion. The savings of seed "under cover," as opposed to sodding, are substantial. In addition, facilities are able to open months in advance with excellent playing conditions. If proper covers

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are purchased for new construction, they can be used for many years for winter protection or ongoing maintenance.

3. Ongoing Maintenance—Even though new construction grows worldwide, it barely keeps up with demand. Play on existing golf courses and athletic fields continually increases. Not only are superintendents battling weather changes and course conditions, but they must now control the increased flow of people and the damage they leave behind. Covers are a common, effective tool for a “quick fix.” In heavy-use areas, such as tee boxes, driving ranges, or center play portions of sports fields, covers are placed over the repaired areas and within days they can be back to playing condition.

The key to covers is choosing the correct one for the specific job. All covers will not work in all applications. For the best results, look for the following features:

- Covers must be multi-purpose for new construction, winter protection, and ongoing maintenance.

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- Covers must have one-piece construction in order to reduce handling.
- Covers must be available in a range of standard sizes to satisfy small areas, such as tee boxes, or larger areas, such as 10,000-square-foot greens.
- Special sizes must be available for custom fits. Covers that are either too long or too short are not cost-effective.
- Covers must be non-absorbent. Covers that are absorbent become dirty and heavy, which reduces their performance as well as increases handling and storage costs.

- Covers must be light in weight to reduce handling and storage area requirements.

- Covers must allow the proper mix of air, water, and sunlight penetration.

- Covers must be compact for easy indoor or outdoor storage.

- Covers must be able to last five to 10 years with little or no loss in performance as they age.

- Covers must be strong enough to withstand heavy winds and remain in place rather than blowing off the area of application.

- Covers for sports fields, often 20,000 square feet or larger, must be especially lightweight—but strong. (At Mile High Stadium, for example, only three Evergreen covers were used to cover the entire field.)

Like mowers, sprayers, and utility vehicles, covers are vital turf management tools. They save time and money, while improving turf quality and expediting new sports field and golf course construction. Covers work—their role continues to increase. □

Editor's Note: Peter Hinsperger is president of Hinsperger Poly Industries, Ltd., based in Ontario, Canada.

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