



Ky. Blue – Tough Against Kids in Keds

Kentucky bluegrass shows greater tolerance to *abrasive* wear than other cool-season species, including perennial ryegrass, reports J. Michael Henry, environmental horticulture advisor with University of California, Riverside Cooperative Extension. This should come as news to those who've seen charts of turfgrass species' characteristics and noticed, under some heading like "Wear/Traffic Tolerance," that both perennial ryegrass and tall fescue tend to rate higher than Kentucky bluegrass.

What is "abrasive" wear, and what sites are afflicted? It's a type of wear caused by flat, rubber-soled sport shoes and will commonly occur where children play in their sneakers (parks, playgrounds, home lawns) or wherever else that type of shoe is worn, such as tennis, lawn bowling or cricket sites.

Henry reached his conclusion several years ago while on sabbatical at the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) in Bingley, England, where he used a "differential slip wear machine" to conduct research on closely mown cool-season species to determine relative wear tolerance. The machine simulated three types of wear: heavy studded (similar to that caused by football, soccer or rugby play), spiked (as in golf) and abrasive. Grasses evaluated included varieties of bentgrass, the fine-leaved fescues, tall fescue, perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass.

As expected, perennial rye and tall fescue prevailed under football-type wear, but under conditions of both close mowing and *abrasive* wear, cultivars of Kentucky bluegrass generally performed best. For perennial rye, Henry speculates the study may reflect not so much the turf's response to abrasive wear as its intolerance to persistent close mowing.

A surprising result of his study was tall fescue's response to close mowing. Henry has found little published information on the relative tolerances of the coarse turfgrasses, particularly tall fescue, to persistent close mowing and was surprised during his evaluations to see that cultivars of tall fescue proved fairly tolerant. "Indeed," he says, "if the cultivars tested are fairly representative, then this grass [tall fescue] would appear to be more tolerant of persistent close mowing than perennial ryegrass." (Of the three turfs, Kentucky bluegrass was the most tolerant of persistent close mowing.)

But, as might be expected, not all cultivars of Kentucky bluegrass tested the same. Some did no better than some of the bentgrasses under the test's conditions.

Unfortunately, I cannot specify the high-ranking cultivars of Kentucky bluegrass because I've not seen Henry's full report, only a summary of his I came across in *California Turfgrass Culture* (Vol. 46, Nos. 3 & 4, 1996), from the University of California Cooperative Extension. Turf managers teased by my summary of his summary can find the full report in the *Journal of the Sports Turf Research Institute* (Vol. 7, 1995) under the title "Effects of Abrasive Wear on Close Mown Amenity Grass Species and Cultivars," by J.M. Henry, A.J. Newell & A.C. Jones.

NTEP on the Web

In case you hadn't heard, the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program now has a Web site, a good one:

<http://hort.unl.edu/ntep/>.

Strip Sodding

By Jim Puhalla

An option for the center portion of football fields, as well as for bench areas, is sodding those areas only. Consider sodding a 25-foot-wide band down the middle of a field where mechanical stress has worn through to the soil. Use a mature sod with a *heavy thatch* layer. (Northern fields that are slit-seeded annually often revert to their "mud bowl" character by the end of the season.)

In field trials, we found the thatch layer of sodded sections intact and still keeping players up out of the mud after more than 100 practices on the field. However, experience shows that the new sod will last only one season before soil becomes so thoroughly mixed into the thatch layer that muddy conditions re-appear. Although this is not an inexpensive technique, strip-sodding can provide a solid playing surface for a season's worth of use.

An informed decision on whether to seed or sod requires considering the use the field will get, as well as the time and resources that can be spent on maintenance. Seeding is cheaper but requires more work and care, and it takes longer before the field can be used. Sodding is more expensive, but allows the field to be used within a couple of weeks. Look at the whole picture and make your choice.

If you have a tip to share with others, send it to

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