

Crazy after all these years

I am very fortunate to be sprigging all my own fields after purchasing my own sprig planter. Our school district is very supportive of promoting safe fields. I am currently getting ready to put in a field in which I am going to try a combination of "Quickstand" and "Baby" Bermudagrass. I like the density of Baby and the wear tolerance of Quickstand. We have actually used 20-ounce round up to the acre over the top of Quickstand and Baby to transition out rye and other undesirable weeds with no damage to our bermuda. Am I crazy for combining the two varieties?

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You have probably received as much difference in opinion on this subject as there is difference in appearance of these two bermudagrass varieties. Just like mixing the grasses I have a mixed opinion on the possible outcome, but I am clearly behind your initiative to discover an improved grass system.

My guess is that in time the Quickstand may overtake the Baby because Quickstand has better winter tolerance and spreads faster over the surface. If you follow my rationale on planting a multitude of different grasses to produce the best biomass then what you propose may not be so crazy. The problem, or risk, comes in what expectations you have for the field. If this is a highly visible competition field then you may have some explaining to do if the appearance is not-so-uniform because of patches of coarser bermuda (Quickstand) mixed in with patches of finer texture bermuda (Baby).

If the area is used for soccer you may find that the smoothness of the surface may be compromised at times because of the differential in green-up and vertical growth rate for these very different bermudagrass varieties. If you are overseeding with rye, the two different grasses may also transition differently. If you are not so worried about appearance and more concerned about density and cover then this could possibly give you the dual benefit that you seek—a dense mat from Baby and fast recovery from Quickstand.

Which will dominate in the intense traffic areas? My guess again is that the Quickstand will dominate the intense traffic areas if the turf is ever worn very thin and allowed to recover by spreading. The fact is that we just can't say for sure just how these two grasses perform when planted together. My guess is that they will segregate into separate patches, but my hope is that they will blend together more uniformly to provide a denser mat that takes longer to wear thin.

I do a lot of playing around with ideas like this on practice fields and in areas where failure or unexpected results can't hurt me. That's where I would start with a

project like this to gain some first hand experience. Stick to your guns, be prepared to wipe the egg off of your face, and like all good researchers go where the results take you.

Is it a crazy idea? Mixing cool season grass varieties is a common practice to achieve better genetic diversity and combine attributes from each grass. But vegetative types of bermudagrass are grown as monocultures in sod farms and mixtures are seldom attempted. The thought of contaminating one variety of bermuda with another is so unpalatable to sod producers that such a mixture on purpose would seem blasphemous. However, I do like your initiative to rank turf cover and playing performance ahead of appearance for some fields; there will be a special place for you in the Athletic Field Safety Hall of Fame.

If it is any consolation, here are a few things that started out as a crazy idea and ended up as standard operating procedure: seeding ryegrass at anything over 7 pounds per 1000 square feet.; cutting sod 2 inches thick for anything; sticking a 1-inch steel rod in the ground over and over and over—vertidrain; topdressing with chopped up tires; growing grass in sand; pregerminating seed; and one of my favorites that is still being tested, seeding bermudagrass as an annual to patch worn northern fields.

There may be a big difference of opinion as to the outcome of mixing Quickstand and Baby, but one thing we can all agree on is that you will be the first one to do it. My recommendation is that sports turf managers need to explore ideas such as this that have a reasonable chance of success, but do them in areas where an incomplete success won't compromise your job.

Last year I included monocultures of Quickstand and a common vegetative bermudagrass in my Iowa traffic trials. This year I'm adding a treatment mixing Quickstand and Baby just for you. We can share our notes with the other nuts at the 2003 STMA Conference in San Antonio. Don't forget to take some pictures or your bermudagrass mixtures.

As a side note let me encourage all of you to purchase a digital (or other) camera and use it in your work to document the problems and solutions related to your job. If you are digging up buried problems, you better take a picture before you bury it up again. Pictures of your field-related problems and questions certainly help my diagnosis and recommendations for your specific situation, so keep those jpgs and mpgs coming.



Have Questions?

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