

# Seeding strategy a little weak? SHAME ON YOU!

I am a commercial ag dealer trying to help our local school improve their athletic field. We have a sand-based high school field and we want to follow your recommendation of seeding after each game. We are not sure what type of equipment to use. Can we just broadcast seed or do we need to purchase an inter-seeder or is a drill sufficient to lay in the seed?

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I am a real proponent of frequent and higher than "normal" seeding rates when trying to establish grass amidst the onslaught of traffic, no matter what the soil type is on your field. Go to <http://turfgrass.hort.iastate.edu/extension/seed.pdf> for my guide on "Athletic Field Seeding Schedules." There are many opportunities to successfully plant cool-season grass seed other than the optimum time, which is September. Athletic field schedules don't always allow you time to get in there and do the seeding the way you would like, drill seed in multiple directions, and keep people off of it for 4 months, ha ha. If your fields are thin in traffic areas and you are seeding once or twice a year then shame on you, you're old school.

Here's my seeding philosophies that I like to recommend in my "Don't Be Caught Bare" program; you figure out how to fit them into your program.

- Don't be caught bare. Any time a spot on the field as big as your hand stays bare for a week, and you have done nothing, then shame on you for not trying to maintain a protective biomass of cover over the soil. The goal is to keep the players out of the soil by continually replacing lost plants.

- Our research shows that the most traffic tolerant seedling grass is perennial ryegrass, followed closely by tall fescue, and Kentucky bluegrass is a very distant last. I still recommend using Kentucky bluegrass in at least one seeding during the year, especially if you have 60 days of inactivity on the field following seeding, but if you want to see turf cover increase then perennial ryegrass or tall fescue gives you quicker and better long term turf cover results. If you don't have a specific grass strategy in mind then shame on you. If you have given up on your practice fields because the traffic is too much then you might want to try a 50:50 mix of perennial ryegrass and tall fescue just to get some cover started. Don't forget to seed often.

- Never miss the optimum time to seed in late summer, i.e., from mid-August through September. Even if you high traffic areas appear to be at their best in late August, they should receive a seeding then because it is important to have plants germinating and establishing as the existing mature canopy is wearing thin. The new plants you make in the fall are those that give you density in the spring or the following fall. If you are not thinking that far ahead then shame on you.

- Our research trials show that a single seeding on the first of September with perennial ryegrass and tall fescue at rates up to 45 lbs/1000 sq.ft. increased turf cover as traffic levels increased. This provides justification for heavy seeding rates and it should give you confidence that money is not being wasted on this type of seeding strategy. If you have bare ground at the beginning of the playing season and you are using old school seeding rates of 7 lbs/1000 sq. ft. for perennial ryegrass and tall fescue then shame on you.

- Pregerminated divot mix applied after every game should be a management strategy for all college and professional level fields. If you're not using it you are watching bare ground develop right before your eyes as the season progresses. Shame on you. Contact <http://turfgrass.hort.iastate.edu/extension/preseed.pdf> for the pregerminated divot mix recipe.

- Multiple seeding (a minimum of six times per year) with multiple methods (three is preferred) is the best way to insure coverage and reduce exposed soil. Anything less then shame . . .

Joel is dedicated to helping Grimes' school improve turf cover by paying more attention to seeding opportunities during the entire year. If you are waiting until the teams are totally off of the field then you are missing important times to get plants started. If you are seeding only twice per year then start seeding a minimum of six times per year (see seeding schedule and even seeding in the middle of the summer is sometimes a necessary option).

There is no need to seed into low traffic sections of the field where soil is not exposed since the mature plants there already dominate; more seed

won't make the stand thicker. If you are seeding before or after every game then simply use a method that does not thin the turf. Solid tine aerators, Aeroway, and Aerovator are conventional equipment that does a good job of planting seed also. The TPI seeder and Terra Combi are examples of machines that can poke small 5/16-inch holes on 1-inch centers.

Both the aerators and seeders can be used multiple times with minimal disturbance during the season without disrupting play. When you have more downtime on the field, then slicer seeders, drills and hollow aerifiers can be operated over a field two or more times to provide good coverage. Seed planted in aerifier holes is more traffic tolerant since the crown and tuft of grass develops in a protected hole. Broadcasting seed also helps fill in some of the spaces and covering it with light topdressing of sand or compost improves germination. Using all of these methods at least once during the season, i.e. drill, punch, and broadcast, is the best way to attack intensely trafficked areas of your field. If you don't try them, then shame on you. **ST**



**QUESTIONS?** Send them to Dave Minner at Iowa State University, 106 Horticulture Hall, Ames, IA 50011, or email [dminner@iastate.edu](mailto:dminner@iastate.edu). Or, send them to Grady Miller at the University of Florida, PO Box 110670, Gainesville, FL 32611, or email [gmliller@mail.ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:gmliller@mail.ifas.ufl.edu).