



FUNGICIDE ELIMINATES LEAF SPOT BEFORE STADIUM OPENER

When the University of Central Florida (UCF) received approval to build its new \$55 million football stadium in Orlando in 2005, Robert Sample, UCF sports turf and grounds director, got the challenging assignment to create the field. Sample worked for nearly two years with his nine-man crew to lay the sprigs for the stadium's Tifway 419 bermudagrass and carefully cultivate the perfect playing field.

Just weeks before the cleats of the UCF Knights and Texas Longhorns tore into the field for the football opener, Sample suddenly had a more devastating and unwelcome opponent: leaf spot.

Leaf spot fungi may be active at a variety of temperatures, but is most commonly associated with frequent moisture on the leaf blades and high relative humidity. Florida's high humidity and the afternoon showers that occur nearly every day in the summer-time precipitate the fungal growth.

"Leaf spot is inevitable in our area, but it came at the worst time," said Sample, who brings years of experience as a golf course

superintendent to his turf role at UCF.

Bright House Networks Stadium is among the 30 acres of turf Sample supervises at UCF—that also includes the Jay Bergman Field for baseball as well as track, soccer and softball complexes. His challenge is keeping all the grounds well groomed while juggling the coaches' needs and the teams' hectic, year-round schedules.

While the coaches fine-tuned their playbook, Sample and his crew scrutinized the turf and performed final tasks, such as painting the field lines. That's when they noticed the outbreak of leaf spot, which appeared as small to red purplish ovals on the turf. The foliar lesions caused discoloration on the turf, resulting in a "bronzing" effect.

Sample needed help to cure this epidemic quickly. He called on Bob Hess, a trusted distributor from the Orlando area.

"We've had an ongoing partnership with UCF during the creation of this new stadium," said Hess of Howard's Fertilizer.

On one of his routine visits, Hess saw the outbreak of leaf spot and he knew Sample was under pressure with the season opener just weeks away.

"My first reaction was to apply fungicide," Hess said.

Sample followed Hess' advice and applied Insignia immediately to his hybrid bermudagrass at a rate of 40 ounces per acre (0.9 ounces per 1,000 sq feet).

Sample was more than pleased with the product's results.

"The leaf spot outbreak was cleaned up by our Texas opener and the field was looking its best at game time," he said.

While the Insignia fungicide application defeated the outbreak, the Knights weren't so lucky. They lost to the Longhorns, 35-32.

Knights fans look forward to many football victories in the new Bright House Networks Stadium. Sample's victory is adding an effective product to his rotation to control leaf spot, while establishing a tradition of turf excellence for UCF athletics. ■



Robert Sample

This article was supplied by Padilla Speer Beardsley, Minneapolis, MN.