

# Keeping it real



*My stadium field at the city owned Open Space Sports Complex is host to Dordt College and our local high school and junior varsity teams. May 22 I aerified and overseeded the worn center of the field with 5 lbs of Kentucky bluegrass per 1000 sq.ft. as you suggested. I have been using Primo on the rest of the field and would like some advice on how it will affect the newly seeded areas. Do you have any other tips on getting the field to fill in faster? Football starts in September, just 3 months away.*

*Brad Vermeer, Sport Turf Manager, Sioux Center, IA*

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### Questions?

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I've actually known Brad for several years as an excellent sports turf manager in northwest Iowa. It's a 4-hour trip to campus from his neck of the woods and travel budgets are getting tighter so it was good to see him at the Midwest STMA Field Day in Ames during the summer. I could tell he was developing a strategy for his field woes and he wanted to bounce a few ideas off of some of the patrons at the Field Day. I gave him my usual seed heavy, topdress and aerify at the start of the day and after viewing some of the field demonstration plots he added "frequent and more nitrogen" along with Primo growth regulator. A follow-up call to Brad in November gives even more details of how he got his field back:

- No grass in the center of the field on May 22 so he aerified, topdressed, and overseeded with 5 lbs Kentucky bluegrass/1000 sq.ft.
- Applied Primo at 12 fl.oz/A every 2 weeks on the 1.5-acre field from July 1 through August 11 for a total of four applications and a total cost of about \$120, figuring about \$40/month of PGR.
- Applied 8.5 lbs of nitrogen/1000 sq.ft. from May 25 through October 22 on the native soil field.
- Mowed every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at a 2-inch cutting height.
- Solid deep tined aerified two times, conventional aerified four times, and topdressed six times (totaled 30 tons of sand on center 20,000 sq.ft. of field) from May 22 through October 25.
- The result was 100 percent turf cover with no bare soil showing at the start of the playing season in early September.
- After 31 games, with six in the rain, the center of the field retained 70% turf cover and he had a very respectable season.

Brad plans to repeat the program next year.

Aerifying, topdressing, and higher than normal seeding rates, as Brad has demonstrated, are standard practices on intense traffic areas of priority fields. Anything less is "old school" or "rooky" field management depending on which type of generational slang you prefer. Brad's strategy adds two new tools that force growth and reestablishment of intensely trafficked areas. Many of the improved Kentucky bluegrass varieties have better density that is desirable for athletic fields; however their diminutive growth habit makes them even slower to establish 100 percent turf cover. Higher seeding

rates help, but recent trials demonstrated at the STMA Field Day show that higher rates of nitrogen split into more frequent applications forces the type of growth that speeds turf cover.

We have observed that the speed of turf cover increases as nitrogen increases up to 10 lbs N/1000 sq.ft. year. In these "force grow" situations we suggest applying 1 lb N/1000 sq.ft. every 20 to 30 days until the turf canopy has completely covered the bare soil. If the grass doesn't become too lush then continue for another few months until a bit of thatch or mat develops some cushion to the field. Brad's program ended up using 8.5 lbs N which is not excessive when trying to force growth and recovery of high traffic areas.

Brad was also having success with Primo on other areas of his facility to regulate growth, reduce mowing, and improve turf appearance, so he wanted to try it out to enhance establishment.

It sounds crazy to use a product that slows growth when in fact your strategy is to speed growth in terms of turf cover. Actually, Primo slows vertical growth (taller grass doesn't really help with turf density) and enhances production of tillers, roots, and rhizomes that are important aspects of turf cover and density. The goal of the extra nitrogen was to increase tillering and plant maturity, but unfortunately it also increases vertical leaf growth and the need for more mowing. Primo offsets excessive leaf growth that actually helps the plant redirect energy into root and rhizome production. The combination of nitrogen and Primo have the net effect of reducing establishment time and providing the densest turf cover by the beginning of the football season.

Nitrogen and Primo rates may need to be adjusted to fit your specific turf establishment situation, so don't be afraid to adjust the rates to fit the seedling stage and growing conditions. Brad used half the normal rate of Primo and made applications every 2 weeks instead of applying the full rate every month.

If you know Brad Vermeer then you know he would never toot his own horn so let me spit in the tuba for a minute because we all need to find ways to make this happen on our highly visible fields if you don't want to sweep rubber for a living. Brad actually wrote to thank me for giving him some of the information we have shared today; I roped him into helping with the "Q&A" after reading this section of his email: "... This past Friday we had high school homecoming, and then on Saturday we had the 10th game of the season, and the 14th event on the field. The opposing coach came out at 11:30 when we were still painting and mowing the field, and the coach walked all the way across the field and stopped me on the mower. He asked if I took care of the field, and I said yes. He then said no question that this is the best field in the GPAC conference of NAIA schools. The conference has schools that are ranked number 1, 5, and 13 in the nation."

Way to go Coach, and way to go Brad for "keeping it real." ■