

Putting Turf to Bed

SHAWN MOORE, Albuquerque Isotopes

We are planning to do a lot this off season. Our biggest project will be replacing our infield edges with new sod. We have had several years' worth of edging wear out and now it is time to add a little grass. This process also allows us to remove any build up, from conditioner and infield mix, in our edges.

Next on the agenda will be pushing our grass hard to fill in our bare areas from the mass exodus of *poa*. We accomplish this with a lot of quick release N and a heavy dose of major, micros and minor nutrients. A big part of this stage will be inter-seeding the field with a hand-picked blend of bluegrasses, topdressing with 50 tons of sand to try and remove any low spots, and pulling a large, deep core. Irrigation (or "irritation" as we call it) audits will be performed. We are constantly adjusting our irrigation through the year. This fall we will make sure the heads are spraying correctly, replace any nozzles that aren't working perfectly and raise any heads that have become low due to topdressing.

Then, after all events are done around November 1, we will add material and laser grade our skinned areas as well as the warning track. We laser grade in the fall because college season starts in February when the weather is very unreliable. Finally when we take our Christmas break, around December 15, we will place turf blankets on the infield and sideline grass. Putting down a broad spectrum fungicide will protect us from disease while the blankets are on. The field then will be put to bed until late January when we take the blankets off.

PETER THIBEAULT, CSFM, Noble & Greenough School (MA)

With fall upon us and the growing season nearing an end I thought I would share some tips on how we plan to get through the fall and started in the spring. Keep in mind these are tips; not everything will work for everyone. This is related to the things that we do every day and never seem to have enough time to get accomplished exactly the way that we would like.

Not too many outside observers understand how much actually goes into mowing. When you are out there mowing you're covering every square inch of the fields and can see anything that is going wrong. (Chances are you're at least mowing something, even though we had one of the driest summers in 20 years.) We like to start the fall with a mowing height of 2 inches. This height I've found has given us an even canopy of Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass. Whatever height you mow at it is best to try and not remove more than 1/3 of the plant at a time.

For us to follow this rule all turf is cut at least two times a week sometimes three times. Our field hockey starts at 1 1/2 inches. As the fall progresses we will gradually decrease our heights to 1 1/2 and 1 1/4 by decreasing the height as we go. We are trying to keep turf growing as temperatures cool and sunlight decreases.

One of the worst things that we do to our turf is mowing, and with that being said, sharp blades are a must. We change blades weekly depending on conditions. If aerating or topdressing we may need to change more frequently. If your blades are dull, you're pulling and tearing at the plant, stressing it before the group of athletes gets out there to punish it more.

This brings up an important point that should take place at the end of every day or after leaving some diseased turf—washing the mower. We are not talking about rinsing the top of, but under the decks and under the mower taking care to get clippings out from brake system and from in between hydraulic lines. Be very careful to do a good job under the decks this is a breeding ground for bacteria and if not clean will create problems with disease and for the clippings to discharge. Keep you mower cleaned and greased daily and it will run and last the way that it was designed.

Next is aeration, something we never have time to do enough. Our aerator and tractor that pull it I think date back to the 70's or early 80's. The aerator is a pull behind type, so once it is down, that's the way it goes, so we generally use a pattern that mimics making ice on the Zamboni. The tractor that pulls it runs on biodiesel the kids in the school produce. We can't run this machine enough given the very low fuel expense. (My assistant, Dylan Satter, says the smell of fried food keeps him hungry all day.) Dylan, as does the other assistants I've had understand how we feel about aerating. In late March and late November we pull cores and break up the plugs. The rest of the season we use 6-inch slicing tines, which during the summer helps the rain and irrigation penetrate rather than run off. We are all environmental stewards, so by keeping up with aerating we are making sure our other inputs end up in the rootzone where they are needed.

During the fall season we will start with a pitchfork to the goals and team areas. We test compaction weekly with a penetrometer, so based off compaction and wear is how frequently we aerate. We will skip a mowing to ensure we get the aeration in. After all it is easier to aerate than to sod cut and install and who really has time for that? During the fall and spring we could aerate as often as every 2 weeks and usually broadcast seed after.

There are many factors that help us decide, Mother Nature being the biggest. If you have never aerated, I suggest at least 2 times a year with a plug type or hire a company to Verti-Drain. We use a company to do this process for us. We generally base this from event counts and compaction and wear levels. This service is generally not very disruptive to playing surface unless they are pulling boulders up everywhere. We have had this done on fields in morning and played in the afternoon. This service is not cheap, but is a lot cheaper than removing and replacing turf.

The last area is spring preparation. Most leave this until spring and

it usually creates difficult situations. Until the snow flies we will renovate all our worn areas and use covers to help speed up germination of the seeds and existing turf to recover. These covers will also defer traffic from happening as well. As always it is best to use signage to let people know what is going on. We will also go through our skin surfaces through the fall and weed and edge, making sure that we leave them ready to go for the spring. We find it easier to do weed removal and work the edges in fall when soils are cool and moist.

EDDIE WARCZAK, Wisconsin Timber Rattlers

We will core aerate and topdress immediately following the season. We only have a few wear areas that need to be re-sodded so that will be done following the aeration process. We then will go through the home plate area as well as our four bullpen mounds and game mound and make sure that they are all up to standard. Once we have them where they need to be we will put down 1-inch thick insulation over the top of them along with a tarp and sand bags so they will be all set to go in the spring.

We are trying Tenacity this year to try to knock out the bentgrass and *Poa trivialis*. We will be starting the first application the 17th of September with the last application on the 15th of October, spraying every 2 weeks. We also put down a snow mold application which usually occurs around the 3rd week in November. The snow mold

has been very bad the past few years so we are looking at a few different options with that. The last thing that we will do is put down rat poison along the warning track and under our tarps, a few years ago we had lots of vole damage coming out of the winter since we started to put down the poison we have not had a problem since.

LEE KELLER, University of Vermont

Our fall sports schedule will end the last of October or very early November. We will then shut down and winterize our irrigation systems. By mid-October I will have all heads marked and as fields are finished we will begin to core aerate in two directions/overseed and fertilize to harden off for winter.

In Vermont winter can close in real fast or we may be able to work well into December depending on Mother Nature. Ideally I plan to core aerate all our fields and overseed at a 4-6lb/1000 rate doing it as a dormant seeding. I plan on fertilizing with a higher potassium fertilizer to harden off for winter.

We try to mow short (less than 2 inches) for winter to help prevent snow mold. We have had success with this in past years but are always looking at new ideas and ways. One of our biggest problems in past has been ice, mainly through January or February thaw or warmer temperatures followed by rain or melting snow. The water cannot drain through the existing frost layer and becomes ice! ■

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