

# Real-Life Solutions

■ TURF COVERS

Who says you can't grow in bermudagrass greens in December?

BY LARRY AYLWARD

Editor

“Most golf courses wouldn't sprig bermudagrass greens in December,” Danny Malone insists.

But Malone, certified superintendent of the Squire Creek CC, a new Tom Fazio design in Choudrant, La., decided to challenge that norm and sprig his course's putting and chipping greens last December.

## The problem

Squire Creek CC, which opens this month, didn't receive much cooperation during its building phase last year. It rained and rained and rained, Malone says.

“We were so far behind in construction that the putting and chipping greens weren't ready for sprigging until December,” Malone says.

## Problem

Squire Creek CC was so behind in construction because of the weather that its putting and chipping weren't ready for sprigging until December.

Danny Malone, certified superintendent of the course, decided to sprig the greens in December after he discovered that Xton turf covers would take the risk out of the process.



The covers are easy to use and don't hold water.

# Take Cover

So Malone had to decide whether to chance it and sprig the greens shortly before Santa came to town or wait until the early spring. He knew the greens might not grow in if he sprigged them two weeks before the start of winter.

## The solution

Malone decided to sprig the greens on Dec. 10 — after he was convinced that Xton's turf covers would take the risk out of the process.

Malone heard about Xton's turf covers through research conducted by Mississippi State University. MSU turf professor Mike Goatley and MSU golf superintendent Pat Sneed are conducting a three-year study entitled, *Evaluating Temporary Covers for Winter Protection of Bermudagrass Putting Greens*.

The two men are evaluating 12 different materials and combinations of materials as temporary covers on the practice putting green at MSU's golf course. The cov-

ers are applied in the winter each time the daily minimum temperature is projected to fall below 25 degrees F for at least two consecutive days and are removed when temperatures moderated. Data loggers record temperatures under the covers at the soil surface and at a 4-inch depth at 15-minute intervals.

Xton turf covers have performed well in the study, and Malone opted to try them.

John Locker, president of Xton, has been producing large-scale covers for years at his company in Florence, Ala. Two years ago, a golf course opened next to his company. Locker was not impressed with the spun-bonded, heavy-when-wet polypropylene material the course used to cover its greens in the winter. Locker said he thought his company could make something better.

Today, Locker says his company has and is now a supplier of turf covers to the golf course industry. He says his durable, lightweight golf covers are constructed of woven polypropylene,

which doesn't hold water and allows the covers to be easily placed on and removed from greens.

Locker says he told Malone he would be able to successfully sprig his two TifEagle bermudagrass greens if he used Xton's white turf covers on them. “I told him the greens would be ready to play in the spring,” Locker says.

Locker says the white covers create a greenhouse effect so turf can grow under them. The covers allow air in and out so moisture evaporates, which inhibits turf disease.

“We covered the two greens every night it got into the 30s,” Malone says. “We stopped using the covers in early April, and the greens were 60 percent grown in. They were completely grown-in in May, five weeks earlier than they would have grown in if we would have waited until the middle of last April to sprig them.”

In the winter, the soil temperature of the two greens at 2 inches deep was 19 degrees

to 22 degrees warmer than the air temperature in the morning, Malone says.

Malone also prefers the covers because they're easy to use. "Four people can put them on in five to 10 minutes," he says. "They also don't retain water, where others can get so heavy you can't move them."

Locker says a 72-foot by 100-foot turf cover weighing about 150 pounds can be installed or removed by two people in less than 10 minutes.

Xton also offers black covers for frost and freeze protection. "The black covers are used mainly for winter protection, particularly

for bermudagrass in the Southeast," Locker says.

While the white covers can be left on greens for several months, the black covers shouldn't be left on for more than a week.

Xton also recently introduced a green and white cover manufactured from knitted polypropylene to help Southeastern golf courses protect their bentgrass greens. "We've found we can lower the temperature of bentgrass greens in the Southeast by 10 degrees to 20 degrees," Locker says, noting the covers are still being tested at MSU.

Locker doesn't recommend ordering form-fitting

covers for greens, although his company won't turn down such orders. Square and rectangular covers are less expensive than form-fitting covers and are easier to use. The cost of standard covers is 15 cents per square foot.

**Outlook**

Another positive attribute of the turf covers is they can help superintendents avoid overseeding bermudagrass greens, Locker says. If it's 40 degrees or below, the greens should be covered. If it's above 40 degrees, the covers should be removed. If superintendents and their crews follow this daily procedure during the cold months,

they might not have to overseed, Locker says.

Malone says he'll use Xton's white covers on all of the course's greens this winter mainly to protect the turf from winterkill. But he's also happy to know the turf will hold its color long enough so he doesn't have to overseed.

"If we cover them on nights that there's a potential for frost, we can extend their color into January," says Malone, adding that overseeding new bermudas like TifEagle is difficult because the transition is tough on the turf. "Then one painting we'll get us to March, when the greens will green back up." ■