



WINNING THE BERMUDAGRASS BATTLE

One Maryland superintendent needed a new way to finally gain control over Bermudagrass on his course.

by **Debbie Clayton**

Mother Nature may want to keep Bermudagrass growing in the fairways and roughs of a certain suburban Washington, D.C. golf course, but Dean Graves, wants it out. Lately, he's been winning the battle.

"Our course is almost 125 years old, so we have a lot

of stuff growing on it," says Graves, CGCS of the Maryland course for the past 16 years. "We are quite close to the city and it gets very hot and humid in the summers. Years ago, course management promoted Bermudagrass in the summertime, followed by overseeded ryegrass in the fall, winter and spring."

When the course was rebuilt in 1998, greens, tees

and fairways were replanted with Crenshaw, L-93, and Southshore creeping bentgrass. Roughs were planted in tall fescue, ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass. Graves joined during grow-in, soon after the renovation was completed.

"All of that Bermudagrass was still in the ground and began growing through the desirable cool-season grasses," notes Graves, who holds a turf-

grass management degree from Penn State and has worked at two other area golf courses. "I've been fighting it since the beginning. We've used a variety of products with very little success. Sometimes they hurt the cool-season grasses just as much – if not more – than the Bermudagrass."

Four years ago, Graves tried a new product to control Bermudagrass on an experimental basis at the suggestion of his BASF field representative. He sprayed Pylex herbicide mixed with Turflon Ester as a spot treatment on 2,000 square feet of his rough. "It did an exceptionally good job and gave us the confidence we could use it as a wider, broadcast application," he adds.

In the three years he's been using the BASF selective post-emergent herbicide, Graves has reduced Bermudagrass population in his 50 acres of roughs by 80 percent. "Pylex has made a huge difference for our golf course," he says. "Nothing has even come close to the results we've had with it. Pylex has turned our program around -- not only is it highly effective but it's relatively low cost as well. I call that a win-win."



Through experimentation and comparing results with other area superintendents, Graves has devised the following program for Pylex use:

Roughs. Once Bermudagrass starts to green-up, Graves applies Pylex at the rate of one ounce per acre. He makes two applications 14 to 21 days apart, stretching it to three treatments if weather remains cool in June. He stops applying it during the heat of the summer, resuming again in late August. He continues with three applications at the same rate and timing through late fall.

Fairways. Graves reduces the Pylex application rate to .25 ounces per acre and makes one broadcast treatment at the beginning of May. "The application will turn Bermudagrass white against the green bentgrass," he explains. "So I can determine where the Bermudagrass is and go back to spot spray it." He then applies Pylex at a rate of 0.10 ounces per acre on a 14-day interval for two more applications. In late August or early September, he returns with two more treatments at .25 ounces per acre.

"If you walk the golf course today, you can see a line where

we sprayed Pylex in the roughs – it's like night and day," adds Graves. "It can be a little sensitive in the fairways because there will be some bleaching, but as long as the golfers know what's going on, they don't mind. I send an e-mail out ahead of time letting them know when the applications will occur. Communication is the key."

In the past, when sections of the fairways turned brown from Bermudagrass going dormant, Graves sprayed Roundup to kill it. He then used sod cutters to surgically remove the dead areas and re-sod them. "We always called it the Patchwork Quilt Effect," he notes. "It used to cost us thousands of dollars each year in sod and labor, not to mention disruption to the golfers – you can't put a price on that."

Graves' ultimate goal is to eliminate Bermudagrass on his golf course. But realistically, he just wants to keep it at a manageable level. "If I can reduce it by 90 percent in our roughs, I'll be happy," he adds. "I bet by the end of this year we'll get it down to that level."

Pylex has slowed the encroachment of Bermudagrass



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Prevent the spring swing lag

As a long-time superintendent, Dean Graves, CGCS, knows you have to change with the times to keep up with the Game of Golf.

"Overall, golfers are now focusing on practicing as much as they are on playing," says Graves. "These days, people don't have as much time as they used to. So they'll come out to the course to chip and putt and take a lesson instead of playing a round of golf."

Because of this trend, the suburban Maryland golf course recently built a new short game area that can accommodate more people taking more practice shots. One acre in size, it encompasses two 007 creeping bentgrass greens and three bunkers in addition to a turf-type fall fescue rough.

"It's been amazingly popular," says Graves. "We've already had to re-sod the approach because it's gotten worn out. And we're just going into the second full year with it!"

Graves implemented a Pylex herbicide program on the short game area rough as soon as the section was completed. He follows the same application rates and timing he put in place for the other fairways and roughs to keep Bermudagrass levels to a minimum. "Golfers want to keep their game sharp so when they do come out to play, they can have a decent round and enjoy it," he adds. "The short game area is just one more way we can provide our members with the facilities they desire."

in the fairways a great deal, too. "I'd say we've been able to hold the population to the same level for the past three years in fairways," he says. "I haven't had the reduction I've gotten with roughs, of course, because of the difference in grass types."

Pylex also controls of goosegrass and crabgrass. Graves only cautions against using the product during high-temperature periods. "If you are careful with timing, rates and temperatures, it will do an outstanding job controlling Bermudagrass," he says. "When it gets up around 85 degrees you have to be careful with

bentgrass."

Since Maryland is in the heart of the Transition Zone, it is Ground Zero for controlling Bermudagrass in cool-season grasses. Further south, it is considered a desirable grass. Further north, most golf courses don't worry about Bermudagrass.

"I know several other golf course managers using the Pylex program in this region," adds Graves. "It's great to be able to compare notes and help each other come up with a solution. After all, Bermudagrass has been an issue on this golf course for 100 years." **GCI**