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## **Maintaining Couch grass fairways in Victoria**

Dear Jeff,

Thank You for making contact regarding maintain couchgrass fairways throughout winter in Victoria. I have had a read of Phil Ford's thoughts and agree whole heartedly with the points raised by Phil.

Over the years of being a Superintendent and working on a wide variety of other turf surfaces, where couch grass is the species being maintained I would like to provide the following observations.

- There are a wide range of couch grass varieties available on the market and there are particular varieties which perform better in certain environments.
- Santa Ana has been around for a long time (50 plus years) and has consistently performed among the top varieties available in a wide range of situations.
- Santa Ana is, without doubt the best option for the climatic conditions in Victoria and in particular Ballarat.
- The conversion to couchgrass fairways throughout golf courses in Victoria has seen an overall improvement in the quality of turf surfaces and a significant reduction in water requirements, to maintain an adequate turf surface.
- The length of dormancy varies each year with the climatic conditions and geographic location. Ballarat in particular is subject to extremely cold conditions and frosts during winter. This tends to place couch grass into a strong dormancy where the turf is devoid of any green colouration what so ever.
- In contrast couchgrass growing in built up urban areas of Melbourne, close to the bay and where frosts are infrequent, can maintain a level of colour throughout the winter months.
- As Phil has stated, going into winter with a good coverage of healthy turf will most likely result in coming out of winter with a healthy flush of new growth in spring.
- Couchgrass does not compete well with other grasses at all and any weed or oversowing will result in a loss of couchgrass coverage. This has the result of prolonging the period of poor turf coverage in spring- early summer, where in fact re-turfing may be required to achieve an acceptable turf cover prior to the next winter.
- Working with the AFL, I see many elite grounds where this problem occurs and the surface has very poor turf coverage between September and January after the rye grass has been removed from the surface, leaving poor sparse turf coverage of couch grass.
- High wear areas that are susceptible to poor couchgrass coverage prior to oversowing are without exception devoid of all turf after winter and require returfing in late spring once rye grass is removed.
- Winter wear tolerance and presentation is greatly influenced by soil type, soil moisture levels and level of wear.
- Couch grown on a well-draining sand will tolerate far greater levels of wear throughout the winter period when compared to the same grass grown on a clay or loam soil.
- Improving the surface drainage of heavy soils will increase the wear tolerance and presentation of dormant couch grass.

## Conclusion

Phil has provided an in-depth review of the options available and costs associated with oversowing. There would, without doubt be an additional cost for re-turfing areas on each hole where couch grass has been smothered over winter also.

A well-drained dry surface during winter will go a long way toward maintaining a suitable couchgrass surface throughout the winter period. Traffic management to limit wear and soil aeration will also assist.

Green pigments can assist greatly in improving the aesthetic appearance of dormant turf and there is good evidence that applying pigments to the turf prior to the onset of dormancy assists in maintaining colour for a longer period.

One important aspect which has also not been discussed, is the game of golf itself.

Golf is a sport which is enjoyed year-round, throughout the changing seasons and as such the way golfing is approached should also adapt to the changing course conditions of each season.

This is a point which is often lost on the golfer who has expectations of a level playing field and a perfect lie year-round. The seasonal changes of a golf course and the adaptation to these changes should be embraced, as this is the true essence of golf.

Striving to improve the course condition and year-round playability should also be pursued. Providing a well-drained surface throughout winter will assist in maintaining a couchgrass surface through this difficult period and also increase the enjoyment of members, playing a dryer course. An assessment of the course to improve drainage and water movement through sand slitting may provide the dual benefits for couch grass and golfer alike.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Bruce Macphee  
**AGCSATech**

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