

Impact of Winter Turf Green & Yellow

By: Wayne Slaton, Golf Course Superintendent

Golfers at our golf course are eager to play, even during the cold snaps we occasionally encounter during the winter. We have our normal frost delays, and you get out on our golf course and see some areas green and some yellow. Yes, this is the difference between cool and warm season turf grasses.

Our overseeded greens, tees, select collars and fairways look like screen saver pictures with some mild days of 80 degree high temps for the turf to have some growth. Our yellow turf play areas are the sections that were not overseeded. Our dormant Tif-419 grass really has the yellow look after a few frosts that get into the upper 20-degree range. The benefits of the dormant non-overseeded play areas are that the golf ball will get some additional roll on drives, but the negative is minimal golf ball control and run out on fairways with the slopes we have on our golf course.

I have had one of our regular players ask, “Why do you mow the fairways so low in the wintertime.” I had to educate them about how we do not mow the dormant yellow turf in the fairways. The reason for the dormant fairway looking as if we have mowed at a low cutting height is actually an impacted result of a large volume of golf cart traffic onto that area. Once the turf goes dormant, turns yellow and stops growing, it will not grow back and recover until spring. This is why cart traffic management is very important to our playability here year-round. Yes, those darned roped off areas.

A great example of effecting playability is my first few winter years here when we didn't have any roped-off areas to control cart traffic and would negatively affect how our golf course plays. For example, on 18 fairway, all the carts would drive down the right side and eliminate the rough because of the cart traffic. You could stop on the cart path at the top of the hill on 18 about where a 200-220 yard drive would hit, and drop a golf ball on the yellow turf near the path, and it would roll all the way into the right penalty area! Reminds me that year of playing 18 with a 4 iron off the tee to stop it in the flat area of the fairway, and then 3 wood to the layup area. So, seeing all struggle to keep a ball in the fairway, we took measures to improve playability by controlling cart traffic, growing rough, and overseeding this area in the wintertime to slow the golf ball after a good golf shot hits the fairway. These are the reasons we overseed those critical areas of our golf course.

With this example of 18 fairway, along with holes 1,7,9,10,12,14,16, where without those areas being green all year, our golf course would play as many had said about our golf course in the 1990's to 2005, "this golf course is unfair and not playable!"



Our greens have above average slopes on them as well. Without overseeding our greens, the speed of the green and level of slope would make it seem unplayable. On windy days you could find yourself putting a ball off the green without some overseeded green turf to help control green speed. Fast greens are great until the golf ball will not stop near the hole. Overseed on our greens also helps with foot traffic wear when our summer Tif-dwarf turf on the greens goes dormant.

A USGA link below about cart traffic:

<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/course-care/green-section-record/60/06/traffic-control.html>

I hope with has been educational and informative. Happy New Year! Hope to see you on our golf course soon.