

PLAY MISTY FOR ME

Supplemental practice tee irrigation assures survival of young seedlings.

by LARRY GILHULY

QUICK! Name the area that gives the first impression of a golf course for many golfers. If you said the practice facility or, more precisely, the practice tee, you are correct. Then why is it that many courses spend thousands of dollars on seed, topdressing, fertilizer, and labor, yet the results are still less than desirable? Although the lack of available labor is a major problem at some facilities, many claim that it is the lack of available teeing area or simply too much use that causes their practice tee to be forever thin. Balderdash! In many cases it is simply the lack of adequate midday irrigation that is so necessary to the immature seedlings.

Misting systems that supplement the regular irrigation system have been around for years in locations near greens to improve turf growth and minimize excess moisture in bunkers. The cost is generally low, yet the results have been exceptional. They are especially effective on severe contours that require midday irrigation and have proven beneficial in establishing

seedlings or sod in these same locations. This concept also has been viewed on teeing surfaces and is becoming very popular on new courses that wish to avoid excess water application into the tee surround complex. If it works on tees, why not the practice tee?

Walter Mattison, CGCS of Widgi Creek Golf Club in Bend, Oregon, saw the logic of applying this same idea to his embattled practice tee. After several years of constant and increasing use, the Kentucky bluegrass tee had changed to a perennial ryegrass surface. Although perennial ryegrass is fast to establish, it must have adequate water to survive during the seedling stage. Due to the constant presence of practicing players, midday irrigation was not possible despite individual head control of the irrigation system. Enter small head irrigation and the answer to the problem.

Walter Mattison, Jerry Palmerton (irrigation technician), and Scott Moffenbeier (Oregon State University turf intern) designed and installed a sup-

plemental irrigation system to provide midday irrigation without bothering players. Specifics of the system include:

- Three separate tees totaling approximately 22,300 sq. ft. Each tee is irrigated as a separate station from the main irrigation control system.

- Half-circle Toro Super 700 series heads spaced 28 feet apart on the tee perimeters. The center of each tee is irrigated with one row of full-circle heads. Flat-angle, 7-degree nozzles on all of the heads. Total heads = 60.

- Total cost for supplies = \$2,000.
- Labor required for installation = 130 hours.

The supplemental irrigation system was used during most of 1997 with very positive results. As temperatures rose, the two tees not in use by the players received two separate, three-minute syringes spaced approximately 3 to 4 hours apart. The following results were observed:

- Faster seedling establishment.
- Noticeable increase in seedling survival.
- Good results on windy days due to low-angle nozzles.
- No player complaints concerning midday irrigation.

The concept of adding a supplemental irrigation system at your practice facility should be carefully considered. Remember the following points to ensure success:

1. Use low-angle nozzles to minimize drift and let players hit over the water.
2. Place as many heads as possible on the tee perimeter to reduce potential damage to the heads from practicing players.
3. Protect heads on the tee with a PVC sleeve.
4. Make as many stations as possible to irrigate the entire area not currently in use by players.

If you are going to spend all of the time and money required to topdress and overseed a practice tee to assure a quality playing surface, don't forget the need for midday watering. All of the seedlings will thank you for playing misty for them!

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Allowing midday irrigation without bothering players greatly improves seedling survival and hastens regrowth.