

(Reprinted from Erosion Control Magazine)

Blackstone National: Seed Versus Sod

The Blackstone National Golf Course in Sutton, MA, is an 18-hole course designed by Rees Jones and Keith Evans and built in 1996-97. Basically, a valley runs through the middle of the property, and elevation changes over 100 ft. occur on either side of this valley. There are many 2:1 and 3:1 slopes, and erosion problems had to be addressed from the beginning. Swales, bales, and erosion control mats have been used to slow down the water on various sections of the course, but the majority of erosion problems were dealt with when shaping the course during construction—care was taken in diverting the water, slowing it down, and putting in break points during grading so that no huge channel of water could form.



The fifth hole at Blackstone National

J. Snyder, superintendent of the course, was looking for an alternative to the sod originally specified around greens, bunkers, and inner roughs when he met **Bob Arello of Hydrograss Technologies in North Oxford, MA, who suggested using EcoAegis, a 100% sterilized wood-fiber mulch bonded fiber matrix (BFM) that can be applied using conventional hydroseeding equipment.** "We could put seed down for half the price of sod," explains Snyder, "but I wanted to seed mainly because there's no better way to build a stand of grass; you get exactly the variety of seed you want and the population that you want."

The BFM was applied on the course using a flexible-backing board to cut around the greens and sharply define the border between the bent grass on the greens and the bluegrass and fescue used on the inner rough. "Following the architect's specifications, there were specific grasses for each area," says Snyder. "Members always want to get out on the course as soon as possible. If you seed the area, it's going to take longer. If you sod it, the members can get back on the course more quickly. But no matter how good the sod company you're using, I've found that you just can't produce a good-quality sod using fescue—it will just fall apart. By using the EcoAegis, however, I got exactly the mix of seed that I was after."