

Sealsle Supreme – The new kid on the block

By Joel Jackson

The seashore paspalum grasses have made a big splash in southwest Florida the past few years, with WCI Communities and Bonita Bay Properties choosing to use these varieties for their acknowledged “Wow!” factor. There is no denying seashore paspalum is a good-looking grass and it has some appealing features.

First and foremost, Tim Hiers, CGCS will flat out tell you that without seashore paspalums the Old Collier Golf Club would not exist simply because there was no available fresh water for the club to access. Because paspalum can thrive on higher salinity water, they were able to use a brackish water source for irrigation. For coastal regions, where fresh water is becoming more scarce thanks to continued development, these grasses offer a practical alternative for golf courses.

Sea Isle Supreme is one of the newest varieties developed by Dr. Ronnie Duncan, famed researcher out of Griffin, Ga., and is currently installed at Old Collier and a few other courses. I met with Dr. Paul Raymer, UGA, Harold Pirkle of Pike Creek Turf and John Holmes from Jennings Turf Farms during the 2007 GCSAA show in Anaheim to discuss Sea Isle Supreme.

“What excites us about this grass besides the inherent tolerance for lower quality irrigation water is that it is truly a ‘tee-to-green’ variety,” Holmes said. “All you have to do is change the height of cut for tees, greens, fairways and roughs. That is unique in turf management.”

Like other paspalums, Supreme has good color retention in cold weather. Holmes mentioned that, when compared to other plots in Georgia, the Supreme was the last to go off-color following Tifway then TifSport when cold weather set in. In Florida from Orlando south, it performs very well in cool weather and comes back quickly from cold snaps.

While acknowledging the attributes



Sea Isle Supreme on the Old Collier Golf Club. Photo courtesy of The Branding Firm

of its ability to use lower-quality water, potentially less water use, and less nitrogen use as definite environmental positives, I asked the group about concerns with diseases.

Pirkle responded, “While paspalums may be more susceptible to disease pressure, that is a variable situation related to growing conditions and stresses. Meanwhile water and nutrient requirements are constant universal inputs and so on balance I would say the grass definitely comes up on the positive side environmentally.”

There obviously are good reasons to use paspalum. I asked the group if they feared that the “silver bullet” label would be put on the grass and too much expected of it.

“We went through a learning curve with the ultradwarf grasses, and the same will be true with SeaIsle Supreme and the other varieties,” Holmes said. “The longer time we work with them, the more we will continue to tweak the best management practices and become more comfortable in our management programs. Tim Hiers certainly has started on the ground floor and continues to evaluate and re-evaluate his programs to get the best results.

“A grass like Tifway after 40-50 years is a proven, known entity. We are just

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at the beginning of the Sealsle Supreme story. In 10 years we will know a lot more. Right now it's not ready for general consumer use, but as we learn to adapt to the nuances of this grass like we have done for others it might just become very common in home lawns.

And Pirkle added, “All the research in the world on test plots can give you some confidence, but it doesn't matter until you finally install the grass on a golf course and subject it to the day-to-day, real-world stresses.”

Right now Sea Isle Supreme is the new kid on the block and so far so good.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This piece is in part an “advertorial” on SeaIsle Supreme because we somehow managed to leave out their ad scheduled to appear in the Winter 2007 Issue. I appreciate the candor of the interviewees to discuss all aspects of the product.