Kill costs courses millions

BY PETER BLAIS
The winter freeze cost Southern courses millions of dollars, forcing many to reseed greens and some to close for as long as two months.

The cold temperatures that struck in early December killed much of the Bermudagrass on courses from Texas to South Carolina. Unfortunately the problem went undetected until spring when the overseeded ryegrass began to die out and the Bermuda traditionally starts to grow. Only this time the Bermuda never greened up.

"It just stayed dirt brown once the rye died off," said Gilbert Medrano, head superintendent at First Colony's new public course in Houston.

The damage was so bad First Colony closed its doors May 29 and wasn't scheduled to re-open until July 26. It cost $25,000 to reseed all 18 greens.

Assistant pro Scott Rethlake pegged lost business at another $180,000. Most courses were able to remain open, but had to resort to temporary greens. Nearby Sweetwater Country Club in Sugarland was "pretty severely" damaged but continued play on temporaries, removing bermudagrass sod from a green damaged by this winter's record cold. The facility was among numerous Southern courses that suffered extensive winter kill requiring greens to be torn up and replanted.

"The extent of the damage wasn't known in many areas until the bermudagrass emerged from dormancy this spring."

S&L crisis hits golf

Let's make a deal goes nationwide...

BY PETER BLAIS
Golf courses nationwide are available at bargain-basement prices thanks to a savings and loan crisis that has left several courses in the hands of the Resolution Trust Corporation.

In the Phoenix, Ariz., area alone, two courses are for sale. Superstition Springs in Mesa and Happy Trails Resort in Surprise were the property of Western Savings, which was placed into receivership May 31, according to Western Savings Vice President of Real Estate Investment and Sales Paul Timm.

"They are being marketed by the RTC, which was established to sell off closed savings and loan properties," said Timm.

Superstition Springs is a 640-acre project undertaken by Western Savings and Loan Association in the early 1970s. The 18-hole Greg Nash-designed course is now up for grabs.

...as foreigners, pensions pick up slack

BY PETER BLAIS
Foreign investors and pension funds are replacing beleaguered savings and loans and commercial banks as major funding sources for existing courses and new course construction.

"With the S&L crisis, those institutions are basically out of the golf course business. A lot of money used to come from the S&Ls. Now they're history," said Stanton Abrams, president of Senior Tour Players Inc., a Boston-based company involved in golf course communities and representing many famous Senior players.

"Commercial banks have had a lot of problems with bad loans. So that money has basically dried up, too."

Foreign investment

Led by the Japanese, foreign investors are now filling a large part of the funding void. The Japanese have bought company involved in golf course communities and representing many famous Senior players."

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Seed harvest excellent

BY MARK LESLIE
A bumper crop looms this month, creating good news for people in the turf seed and golf industries.

"This is shaping up as the best crop in years," said Scott Patterson, vice president in charge of turf seed at Peterson Seed Co. in Savage, Minn. "There's a lot of acreage. We had good rains last fall. Growing conditions were excellent last winter and good this spring. And now they're out and dry like they need to be for harvest."

Dennis Hays, executive vice president of the Oregon Seed Trade Association, whose members grow the vast majority of seed used on golf courses, said his members are well prepared for the harvest.
**Endophytes a critical find for research**

Nature more important in face of environmental constraints, says USDA official

BY MARK LESLIE

As research redoubles to develop turfgrasses that are resistant to every malady and attack from nature, the use of a natural fungus will play a significant role, according to the national director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Turfgrass Evaluation Program.

Speaking from his Beltsville, Md., office, Kevin Morris said "use of endophytes will be more and more prevalent in developing varieties of grass."

An endophyte is a fungus that lives within plants and gives them natural resistance to certain surface insects.

"With the use of pesticides being restricted, this is going to be a bigger and bigger factor," Morris said.

"There are quite a number of perennial ryegrass varieties that have high levels of endophyte in the seed. It was first found in perennial ryegrass and has been bred into several perennial ryegrass varieties."

Now, breeders are searching for endophytes in other species.

Morris said it has been discovered in fine leaf and tall fescues, leading to work to incorporate it into those species.

"It's not as prevalent as it is in ryegrass right now, but it will be down the road. Hopefully we'll find one for Kentucky bluegrass—and maybe bentgrass, eventually," he said.

"Requested for a timeframe for the public to expect new endophyte-laden varieties on the market. Our goal is that if they find an endophyte somewhere in Kentucky bluegrass it will be five or six years before it will be readily available to buy."

**Bent research**

Meanwhile, turfgrass companies in the Northwest are making progress in research into ways to cope with a possible future ban on field-burning.

Doyle Jacklin, vice president of marketing for Jacklin Seed Co. of Post Falls, Idaho, reported that "some varieties of seed are being developed that aren't affected as much as current varieties by absence of burning."

The seed industry contends that field-burning doubles or triples seed yield. Jacklin Seed has confirmed those changes on a 4-acre test site, but in the meantime has also found some new varieties that call for special attention.

"We're marketing a treated mixed seed, which creates a more diverse profile in some of the suggestions that are trying to cope with a future possible ban," he said.

Most of the varieties of seed that have been released this year are high in nitrogen and are designed to be mowed higher and to incorporate that into those species."

**Zoysia sod**

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ability in drought periods than other grasses like fescues and bentgrasses.

Morrow said improved Zoysia is being developed for other qualities, such as shade tolerance.

Stone said Zoysia's advantages are balanced somewhat by its susceptibility to brown patch in early spring and green spot infection that do it more damage than Bermuda.

Yet that apparently detracts little.

"I am amazed people are going that route (sodding fairways)," said Dave Fender, general manager of Key West Turfgrass Co., Hatfield, Mass., "I'm amazed people are going that route (sodding fairways), even though they might not be as good a seed as others."

But golf course superintendents must carry on.

"We envision that especially in the golf industry's increased demand for zoysiagrasses, they're getting a lot of pressure, putting acreage in and then going out and selling it. But that philosophy is going more and more to the wayside," Fender said.

While the prices for common turf seed plummets with over-supply, Patterson said, "The mentality has been to hold prices on proprietary varieties. There's no more money to be made."

"You've got to get your money back," Fender said. "The market in general is going to oversee seed. You've got royalties, administration fees, advertising, a lot of costs they didn't used to consider."

"Fifty of Pursley's 1,500 acres of seed are now in Zoysia. Other farms have as much as 200 or 300 acres of Zoysia."

"Anytime you've got a drought, you're going to overseed no matter what. In the spring of this year to get their money back," Pursley said.

"We envision that especially in the golf industry, the marketplace is going to oversee seed no matter what. In the North it's more of a homeowner market. If the weather is bad and housing starts are down, it's reflected in the marketplace."

"We're finding that most of the turf grasses that are sodded with Zoysia sod are planted in the North are having problems. It's hot and humid weather, they're getting a lot of disease and a lot of kill on grass, and they will be doing a lot of seeding this fall with perennial ryes and bentgrasses."

Heavy rains could harm the harvest, which started a little late, but otherwise the harvest should carry on through July.

"The new seed will be bagged in September and October."