Breaking the mercury habit: Supers share clues

By MARK LESLIE

OCHESTER, N.Y. — June 1994. The month stands out in bold neon, blinking in the memories of golf course superintendents across the country. It marked the end of the Era of Mercury, and thus the threshold of the Time of Troubles — troubles they knew not of then.

"Mercury was one of the fungicides we used for things like snow mold control. But I think it kept a lot of things in check," said Bob Feindt, superintendent at Country Club of Rochester.

"You never saw many of these strange patch diseases that you see today, like root pythium. The cadmiums, heavy metals, knocked out a lot of things," Mercury had been outlawed for several years in some states — basically those with large bodies of water — but remained legal in most. Then the federal Environmental Protection Agency banned it nationwide last June. Now, superintendents in states like New York, who for years had to deal with turfgrass problems without mercury, have the expertise share with newcomers concerning this ban.

A major nemesis on golf courses since the mercury prohibition is moss on greens. "You're seeing moss more and more," Feindt said. "We're creating ideal conditions for it. We cut the grass extremely low and don't feed it as heavily. So we weaken the turf and give less competition to the moss. "Greens that are shaded, or with excessive moisture, encourage moss, also.

Dr. Noel Jackson of the University of Rhode Island promotes an easy solution: raise the cutting heights and increase fertilization. "Iron is a temporary expedient," Jackson said. "It is a very effective desiccant of mosses. But the point is, it's effective but not persistent."

But the basic CC of Rochester, Oak Hill, Oakmont (in Pennsylvania) and thousands of others can't do that. Their members or clientele demand speed on their putting surfaces.

The solution for Feindt and others has been liquid iron. "We tried a potassium salt and it didn't work," said Feindt. "But the green will take a 100 percent iron concentration, you can treat it that way. Or you can dilute it to a 50-50 solution."

Feindt said, "We put it in liquid form in a Windex bottle and spray it on the moss, or apply it with a paint brush. It literally burns out the moss."

"Leave it for a week. It turns black. Then put a plug of fresh grass in. Some guys dig it out. We have a 2-inch plugger."

While moss can appear any time of year, Feindt said he attacks it "more aggressively in the fall — when it's cooler. I take the iron right out of the bottle and hit that spot. You will get more injury to the turf in the hot weather. In October-November you will get some injury but not like in July-August when the plant is under stress. Plus, in the fall it has the winter months to heal over."

Feindt suggested each superintendent "experiment in their own situation, trying different concentrations of iron to get rid of the moss. Nothing is black and white in this industry."

Like with any pesticide or fertilizer, superintendents should conduct the tests on their turf nurseries when possible, before applying it on the course.

Terry Buchen, superintendent at Double Eagle in Galena, Ohio, said he uses frequent, light applications of iron instead of heavy — ensuring, also, there is no nitrogen in the product. His mix: 10 ounces of iron (a 21-percent potassium salts of fatty acids. None of these treatments address the basic conditions leading to moss growth. "Those conditions are anything but instrumental in reducing the growth of the grass," he said. "The only thing that ensured long-term protection was mercury."

How much higher would Jackson have superintendents cut the grass? "You can't generalize," he said. "Some courses can now mow at 1/8 inch and get away with it. Others, where the surface is undulating, get scalped when you mow even at 5/16 inch."

Express Flags, New From Fore-Par.

When the race is on to get flags for your golf course, get to the finish line first with Fore-Par. Our new Express Flags service combines exceptional delivery time with Fore-Par's renowned quality workmanship, innovative design, durability and ease of maintenance.

Because all manufacturing is done at our facility, Express Flags can meet your deadlines without compromising the quality that has made Fore-Par the consistent choice of golf course superintendents around the world. When you place your order, you might find our normal delivery time quick enough to satisfy your demands. If not, just ask for Express Flags service and get what you need, when you need it.

So if you're in a hurry, flag down the fastest flag service available. For your free Fore-Par catalog along with information and Express Flags service rates call our toll-free number today!

MAINTENANCE

BANNED IN THE U.S.A.

On the Course

express flags

Express Flags, New From Fore-Par.

We've Made Better Faster.

When the race is on to get flags for your golf course, get to the finish line first with Fore-Par. Our new Express Flags service combines exceptional delivery time with Fore-Par's renowned quality workmanship, innovative design, durability and ease of maintenance.

Because all manufacturing is done at our facility, Express Flags can meet your deadlines without compromising the quality that has made Fore-Par the consistent choice of golf course superintendents around the world. When you place your order, you might find our normal delivery time quick enough to satisfy your demands. If not, just ask for Express Flags service and get what you need, when you need it.

So if you're in a hurry, flag down the fastest flag service available. For your free Fore-Par catalog along with information and Express Flags service rates call our toll-free number today!

FORE-PAR

DISTINCTIVE GOLF COURSE ACCESSORIES

16761 Burke Lane, Huntington Beach, California 92647
714 842-8494 • 800 843-0809 • FAX 714 842-7384

GOLF COURSE NEWS