Is anyone listening to the battle cry for affordable golf?

Andrew Overbeck, editor

While the tone of Golf 20/20's first annual Golf Industry Report is upbeat, there are several disturbing trends that emerge from the data.

Two are not so surprising, new golf construction is down and rounds played numbers remain as flat as a two-by-four. No shocker there.

But there are more troubling statistics. Construction numbers are not only down, but, of the courses that opened, an increasingly smaller number of them are public access. The number of public courses opening still far outnumbers private courses, but the trend is unnerving just the same. When you combine those numbers with the fact that all of the 27 courses that closed permanently in 2001 were either daily-fee or municipal layouts, the alarm goes off.

I thought the industry was supposed to be focusing on providing more affordable, public-access golf – not less.

At the conclusion of last year's Golf 20/20 conference the message was clear: we need more affordable golf courses to grow the game of golf. The American Society of Golf Course Architects and others have certainly pushed the message and put a plan into action to promote the need for more affordable golf, but clearly more needs to be done.

Watching ill-advised, high-end, country-club-for-a-day courses struggle in today's market has likely poisoned the desire of any developer to build a lower-end public golf facility. If you can't make money at $75 a round, how the heck can you make money charging $30 a round, right? Wrong.

Take a look at the front page of *Golf Course News* this month. Architect P.B. Dye just wrapped up work on a $1.5 million, 18-hole golf course in Indiana that offers outstanding golf for $38 a round including range balls and a golf car.

Sure, a number of things worked in his favor. He's leasing the land, did the construction work himself and largely used his own equipment.

But the lesson here is the strategy he used. Dye built as high-quality a golf course as the market conditions could bear. Then he took a number of smart, cost-cutting measures to reduce the construction expenses even further.

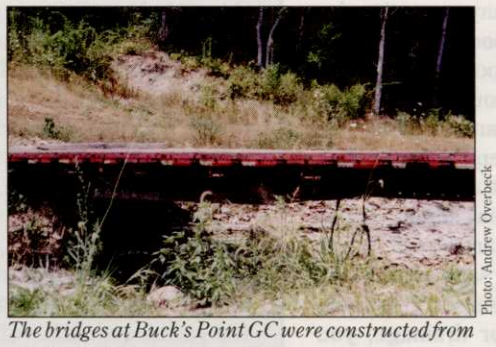


Photo: Andrew Overbeck

The bridges at Buck's Point GC were constructed from the decks of old tractor-trailers.

Except for one machine, all the maintenance equipment is used. All the Rain Bird irrigation heads were purchased used for $5 a head. The course was designed to fit in with the land and thus just 250,000 cubic yards of earth were moved. The greens were constructed out of a topsoil mix and they used only four truckloads of sod to lay one strip around all greens and some of the bunkers.

The most brilliant cost-saving move involves the course's bridges. Instead of building steel I-beam structures, they purchased tractor-trailer decks from a Cincinnati scrapyard for $500 apiece. With the steel and wood decking already in place, they saved a ton on materials and labor costs.

All of these steps do not detract from the beauty or playability of the golf course. The well-designed course was meant to be rustic, but it still provides great golf, and that's all the golfing public wants.

Is this possible at every new golf course? No, of course not. And there is still a market for high-end golf. But there are hints here that could help developers make affordable golf pay off.

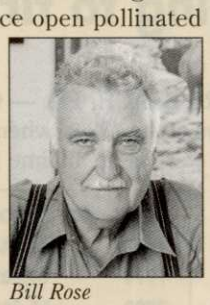
The message is still clear: Keep the golf course simple, and as Dye said, let the golfers "go out there, beat the ball around and have fun." Now the industry just has to convince developers to listen.

POINT

Open pollination presents clear dangers

By BILL ROSE

The recent approval by the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) of a control area to produce open pollinated creeping bentgrass in Jefferson County is a surprise considering the volumes of evidence presented on the dangers of this experiment.



Bill Rose

Dr. Tom Hodges of Purdue University and senior author on seven patents specifically related to hybridization of grasses, submitted the following information to ODA director Phillip Ward for the recent hearing held in Jefferson County:

"I am writing regarding the transgenic bentgrass field trial by Scotts/Monsanto in Jefferson County, Ore. As you know, this trial involves open-pollinated bentgrass that contains the Roundup herbicide-resistance gene. Although I am a strong advocate of genetic engineering, this particular project is extremely dangerous because pollen escape to other grasses has a high probability of causing the development of herbicide-resistant grassy weeds as well as the fertilization of related *agrostis* species. This could have disastrous effects on the turfgrass seed industry because of the contamination of genetically engineered seed with non-engineered grasses as well as the lack of control of herbicide-resistant grassy weeds in all crops including the row crops such as corn, wheat and soybeans. If this trial is allowed to proceed, the damage it could cause is considerable, and this damage will give the anti-biotech forces major ammunition in their fight against all genetically engineered crops."

This letter states the fears I have on this project.

Genetic modification of crop plants for the production of not only food and fiber, but also energy, pharmaceuticals, and structural products is the future of agriculture. However, the Willamette Valley is prevented by statute from participating in genetically modified bentgrass, even if the transgenic bentgrass is male sterile. Male sterility is obviously not understood despite testimony pre-

Continued on next page

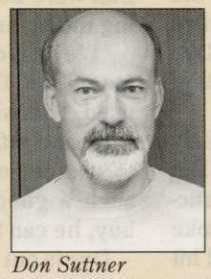
COUNTERPOINT

Roundup Ready control area addresses concerns

By BOB HARRIMAN and DON SUTTNER

One of the biggest challenges in maintaining a desirable, uniform bentgrass fairway is the infestation of annual bluegrass or Poa annua. Removing Poa annua with herbicides is difficult because herbicides also can harm the bentgrass. The alternative is to keep the unsightly bluegrass alive and viable as golfing turf, otherwise the superintendent is dealing with brown spots, bare ground and dissatisfied customers or club members.

Bob Harriman



Don Suttner

The Scotts Co. and Monsanto are developing Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass, improved through biotechnology to withstand treatments of Roundup Pro herbicide. The ability to use Roundup Pro without harming the bentgrass would allow superintendents to control Poa annua and any other weeds in their fairways with just one herbicide. It has the potential to significantly reduce or eliminate the use of several herbicides, fungicides and fumigants that managers now use to manage annual bluegrass.

The Roundup Ready technology in creeping bentgrass is the same technology that has been used successfully in agriculture for nearly a decade. More than 100 million acres of Roundup Ready soybeans, corn, cotton and canola will be harvested this year around the world.

Dozens of experiments with Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass in laboratories and greenhouses, which began in the mid-'90s, led to regulated and contained field trials conducted at test plots throughout the United States. Based on that research, which demonstrates the safety and efficacy of Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass, we have petitioned the USDA for deregulation of this product. We will also be submitting the necessary information to

Continued on next page

GOLF COURSE NEWS
THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY
www.golfcoursenews.com

Publisher
Jonathan Whitney

Editor
Andrew Overbeck

Managing Editor
Derek Rice

Contributing Writers
Kevin Ross, CGCS
Doug Saunders
John Torsiello

Production Director
Joline Gilman

Editorial Advisory Board
Raymond Davies, CGCS
CourseCo
Kevin Downing, CGCS
Willoughby Golf Club
Tim Hiers, CGCS
The Old Collier Golf Club
Ted Horton, CGCS
Ted Horton Consulting
Dr. Michael Hurdzan
Hurdzan • Fry Golf Course Design
Mary P. Knaggs
Bass Rocks Golf Club
James McLoughlin
The McLoughlin Group
Kevin Ross, CGCS
Country Club of the Rockies

Editorial Office
Golf Course News
106 Lafayette St., P.O. Box 997
Yarmouth, ME 04096
207-846-0600; Fax: 207-846-0657
aoverbeck@golfcoursenews.com
drice@golfcoursenews.com

Advertising Offices
Golf Course News
106 Lafayette St., P.O. Box 997
Yarmouth, ME 04096
207-846-0600; Fax: 207-846-0657

Midwest and Western U.S. Sales:
Jonathan Whitney
207-846-0600, ext. 263
jwhitney@golfcoursenews.com

Eastern U.S. Sales:
Michael Pajak
207-846-0600, ext. 223
mpajak@golfcoursenews.com

Marketplace and Classifieds
Anne Washburn
207-846-0600, ext. 230
awashburn@golfcoursenews.com

Subscription Information
Golf Course News, P.O. Box 3047
Langhorne, PA 19047
215-788-7112

For reprint information on orders of 500 copies or more, please call PARS International at (212) 221-9595, or e-mail jennifer@parsintl.com.

United Publications, Inc.
Publishers of specialized business magazines.
Chairman
Theodore E. Gordon
President
J.G. Taliaferro, Jr.

BPA INTERNATIONAL
CHARTER MEMBER NGF NATIONAL GOLF FOUNDATION
AMERICAN ABM BUSINESS MEDIA

GMO danger

Continued from previous page

sented at two hearings and countless other presentations.

To attempt once more to get an understanding of the two programs, I hereby make a comparison between a mule (male sterile) and a stallion horse (open pollinating). Mules can do everything the stallion can do, except reproduce. Conversely, the stallion horse will breed all like horses, spreading his genes wherever he can find a willing mate. This "stallion" cannot be fenced in.

This is the situation in Jefferson County with its history of bentgrass production, which assures volunteer bentgrass plants exist throughout the area. These volunteers, plus the native bentgrasses will be receptive, and become resistant to Roundup and therefore be very difficult to kill. It is easy to predict large problems for the production area: The export market will be lost, the turfgrass seed production for Turf-Seed will be plowed, and all grass seed produced will be suspect and at least require a costly genetic test.

This experiment will benefit a few (400 to 500 acres of production), while risking that production area's markets for turfgrass seed, and jeopardize the future of genetically modified grasses.

All things considered, Pure Seed Testing is emphasizing its program to produce naturally glyphosate tolerant varieties of turfgrass. Those on the market today are Aurora Gold hard fescue, Pure Gold and Tomahawk RT tall fescue. These varieties offer all the advantages of genetic modification by using genes already present in turfgrasses, without the problems of open pollinated genetic modification.

Pure Seed Testing along with HybriGene, Inc. is working on genetically modified turfgrasses for the future. The emphasis will be on trait improvements not only for herbicide resistance, but disease resistance leading to a reduced use of fungicides, insect and pest resistance, drought and stress tolerance and growth habit. All these traits will be incorporated with male sterility to ensure good gene stewardship and eliminate the possibility of pollen escapement into surrounding crops.■

Bill L. Rose is president of four companies, Turf-Seed Inc., Roselawn Seed, and Tee-2-Green Corp. located near Hubbard, Ore., and biotech company HybriGene Inc., based in Rhode Island.

Plan in place

Continued from previous page

the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to clear the use of Roundup Pro on Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass.

Both Scotts and Monsanto take stewardship issues very seriously. That commitment extends from research to end-use on courses. The professionalism of golf course superintendents is one of the primary reasons our companies chose creeping bentgrass to be the first variety of grass developed through biotechnology. We recognize that the turfgrass seed industry is concerned with the potential for cross-pollination, seed scatter and seed mixing among varieties. We are aggressively addressing this by ensuring that Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass seed production is isolated from the Willamette Valley in western Oregon, where most of the world's bentgrass seed is produced.

We asked the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) to establish a control area to keep the production of creeping bentgrass seed developed through biotechnology separate from conventional creeping bentgrass. In July, the ODA established an 11,000-acre control area in Jefferson County, 100 miles to the east and on the other side of the Cascade Mountains, which will be a formidable barrier to any pollen transfer to the conventional seed production area.

The arid surroundings greatly diminish the likelihood that any bentgrass plants could survive outside the control area. Finally, our stewardship plan includes a specified area for seed production, dedicated combines, processing equipment and extensive monitoring.■

Bob Harriman is vice president of biotechnology at the Scotts Co. and Don Suttner is regional technical development manager at Monsanto.