

PLANNED FAIRWAYS

DEPENDABLE UNDER STRESS

Fairways are fine until the first wave of 90° weather hits, says George Thompson, superintendent at Columbia Country Club, Bethesda, Maryland. With a planned fairway program, now he is ready for extreme weather and other stress periods.

Golfers take good greens and tees for granted. Greens and tees are supposed to look like pictures, and on most courses they do. This is generally not the case with fairways, and the golf course superintendent has much room for improvement in this area, according to George B. Thompson, superintendent at Columbia Country Club in Chevy Chase, Md.

"In our area anyway," Thompson told GOLFDOM, "it is easy to take a defeatist attitude and blame it on the transition zone. I don't know how many times I have heard phrases like, 'we haven't had any fairways in 40 summers, so why should this one be different?' or 'no one can grow grass in this area, the cool-season grasses die in the summer and warm-season grasses die in the winter.'"

Thompson said that in his area most courses were originally planted to bluegrass and red fescue mixes. He said with these mixes, the superintendent has about five to 10 years of good fairways depending on management. Eventually, fusarium rosum gets a foothold and the high-nitrogen program forces out the fescue. Goosegrass quickly fills in the high droughty areas which fusarium took out, and *Poa annua* gradually starts to fill in the low, shady areas.

"When *Poa* and goosegrass get a foothold," Thompson said, "you get desperate and are willing to try anything. The members are unhappy. Your fairways were great until the first wave of 90-degree weather hit."

What can a club do to improve itself? Thompson said automatic irrigation is an aid, because with this a superintendent has the flexibility to control water, and fairways can

be syringed and the whole course watered in one night. The superintendent sells the club on another \$5,000 for fairway fungicides and this also improves the fairways. Also, of course the superintendent keeps up on modern technology, he is on a winter nitrogen and iron program, his equipment is up-to-date and he is using insecticides and herbicides to their best advantage.

"However," Thompson said, "all of this will not guarantee good fairways. You cannot buy good *Poa annua* fairways. Each fall you try to incorporate some of the new 'Cadillac' bluegrasses, you aerate and thatch and spread \$5,000 worth of seed. Then in two weeks the fuzz starts coming in rows and next year everything is going to be different, right? Wrong. The young seedlings are *Poa* and we will be lucky to get \$5 worth of seed up, let alone \$5,000 worth."

Thompson said the only way superintendents are going to have any degree of success on bluegrass or bentgrass overseeding is by doing something radical by way of scorched earth with Paraquat or Daconate; or tricalcium arsenate and ease it out a little more subtly. "Some other alternatives may be Pre San, *Poa* San or two or more applications with other pre-emergences," Thompson said. "Or you may decide *Poa annua* is great for 10 months a year and hope that you get a summer like I had last year more often and try to live with it.

"The method I have been successful with is none of these," Thompson said. "Instead, I started working in native Bermuda 11 years ago and in the past five years I have planted Manhattan and Pennfine perennial ryes. I had two reasons for

this. First, I needed a strong grass to compete with the goosegrass in the summer. Second, I needed another strong perennial grass to compete with *Poa annua* in the winter. When I started my Bermuda program I had a tremendous amount of success until I experienced some hard winters. After awhile it became frustrating because I would lose all my north slopes about every other winter. Also, spring dead spot was rapidly becoming another serious problem."

To counteract the spring dead spot, Thompson increased his spring and summer nitrogen to force the Bermuda to cover over. By using additional nitrogen he feels he was making the turf more susceptible to the disease. He said in 1968 his 12th fairway was about 25 percent killed from spring dead spot. He said he had not treated this fairway for goosegrass and by the middle of July the goosegrass had taken over the spring dead spots completely. In the spring of 1969 he was determined to prevent this goosegrass invasion again so he treated the fairway with bensulide. He had no goosegrass that summer. However, instead of circles full of goosegrass, he had circles of dead grass. The bensulide inhibited the Bermuda stolons so much that they did not move more than one or two inches all summer.

"I applied 14 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet on this fairway to no avail," he said. "In the fall of 1969 I revised my game plan and decided to plant the entire fairway to Manhattan rye. We planted this fairway Oct. 15 at 60 pounds per acre in one direction. About 60 to 70 percent of that original planting is still maintaining itself to date, especially in the spring dead spot areas. Since then I have worked Pennfine and Manhattan into all my fairways and the results have been gratifying."

According to Thompson, some advantages of the new perennial ryes are:

- germinate in three to five days, compete strongly with *Poa annua* and overwhelms it eventually
- has finer leaves, forms better sod than old ryes
- more dependable under stress periods, very gradual transition back to Bermuda goes unnoticed by

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most golfers. The Bermuda has four to eight weeks to recover

- more persistent than *Poa annua*; have held it for three or more years on north slopes and in spring dead spot

- resistant to dollar spot and fusarium blight

- fairways are green in spring. Some disadvantages of the new perennial ryes are:

- susceptible to pythium
- increases number of mowings,

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have 18-20 extra fairway cuttings each year, grows throughout the winter

- seed gets transmitted to other areas and clumps begin developing on or near aprons

- does not have playing characteristics of Bermuda

- no shade tolerance.

Establishment. "I have four fairways I seed every year," he said, "these are fairways that I have been unable to grow Bermuda on successfully. They were 100 percent *Poa annua* and now after four years the

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Poa annua has been reduced to less than 30 percent. The remaining fairways are seeded every third year and in most cases this is adequate. I seed about 13 acres a year."

Maintenance. "We mow fairways three times a week at 7/8 inch during the season," he said. "We have reduced the nitrogen to about five or six pounds a year, phosphorous and lime as needed and three to four pounds K_2O , applying one pound in spring and two to three pounds in early September. □