



John McNamara

Brown-Patch

In Western Pennsylvania

By JOHN McNAMARA, First Vice President
National Association of Greenkeepers of America
Pittsburgh Field Club
Pittsburgh, Pa.

BROWN-PATCH has been so much discussed in the past few months, that I think a few more lines on this subject may not be out of order.

From my observations, this disease makes its appearance in the Pittsburgh district any time from the first week in June until the first week in September, according to weather conditions. In 1925 we had our bad spell of brown-patch about the 8th of July, and in 1926 the month of July and the early part of August was cool and clear. We were all elated, thinking that we had escaped this evil for at least that season, but lo and behold, on August 17th the weather changed and the Pittsburgh district experienced the worst attack of brown-patch in its history. I do not think it missed any golf courses in Western Pennsylvania. This year things went along very well until August 1st and after two or three days and nights of rain, we had another pretty bad spell.

Chemical Control and Weather Conditions

Most of our greenkeepers have been using chemicals of some sort to try and head it off. At a meeting held in Pittsburgh last winter, an officer of a golf club made the assertion that there was absolutely no excuse for brown-patch now as there are so many preventives on the market. I often wonder if we are not wasting a lot of time and money by using these so-called preventives as when we have a rainy spell of several days or nights with the humidity pretty high, I have not found a chemical which can stop this disease until the weather changes. I do not believe in any chemicals where they recommend washing in with water after they are applied, as in my opinion, by doing this you wash the chemical into the ground, and it is not the roots the fungus attacks, but the grass blades. By applying chemicals to the blades of the grass the best results are obtained. If after an application, a heavy rain should come, I figure that the work was done without any results. The mixture I use is composed of one pound to fifty gallons of water to every 1,000 square feet. This in itself never

burns the grass. In order to keep the application on the grass, we do not use grass catchers until after a rain or the green has been watered.

The Expense of Fighting Fungus Diseases

Some of the chemical dealers recommend an application about every two weeks. It has been my experience that in "fungus weather" even once a week will not prevent it. I have known of cases where chemicals used on an eighteen hole golf course cost from ten to fifteen hundred dollars for the season. I have begun to wonder if the average eighteen-hole golf course really wishes to spend this large sum of money for just the looks of the greens. Brown-patch does not hinder the putting surface to any great extent and in due course the grass will resume its natural color, whether the chemicals are used or not.

Algae Worse Than Brown-Patch

Another fungus which attacks the grass at this time of the year is a bit different and much worse than brown-patch when it appears, as it kills the roots as well as the leaves of the grass. You will notice sometime in looking a green over carefully, the grass getting thin in several places, during damp weather. If you examine it you find there a black wet or damp scum killing or eating away the crowns of the grass. A bad attack of this fungus and the greens do not come back. Whenever I find that a green is in that condition, the best results are obtained by using a perforator over the parts affected. This breaks the solid scum and we then cover these parts with fine sand thereby letting the air in to the roots or crowns and the grass starts to improve.

Snow-mold Only Temporary Disease

Still another variety of fungus is snow-mold which appears on some greens in winter with the snow. This has never done much harm in this section. It shows up for a while when the snow is melting off the greens in the early spring. This fungus thins the grass in patches but soon covers up with the advance of spring.

Scientists employed by the government and also by manufacturers of chemicals are doing an earnest and invaluable service for greenkeepers in their research work. However, the "perfect cure" for brown-patch and other fungus diseases has not, in my opinion, yet been evolved.