



Dr. Bruce Martin Reflects On His Turf Career

By Patrick O'Brien, agronomist, Southeast Region | November 17, 2017



Dr. Bruce Martin teaching attendees at the annual spring meeting at the Clemson Pee Dee Research and Education Center.

An icon in the turf industry will soon retire. Dr. Bruce Martin, noted Clemson University plant pathologist, has announced that he will retire in June 2018. I recently had the opportunity to interview Dr. Martin about his career.

Question: When you arrived at Clemson, the majority of golf courses in South Carolina had bentgrass putting greens. Today, most golf courses have transitioned from bentgrass to bermudagrass. If you were starting as a plant pathologist at Clemson today, what would be some of your main focus areas?

Answer: If I were starting now I would study the things I have been working on recently, including ultradwarf bermudagrasses and their disease and nematode issues. The ultradwarf bermudagrasses are here to stay and hopefully better types can be developed. Nutrition and disease is another area needing a lot of attention; especially the pathogen biology among the Pythium diseases as well as [take-all root rot](#) and similar diseases. Also, I'd like to study the role of shade in disease susceptibility and continue working on minimizing biology and control. Fungicide resistance issues are also looming. Additionally, we need to learn more about how disease control and plant nutrition in the fall affect spring transition. I would also continue working on nematode biology and control.

Question: When you were growing up, did you ever imagine that you would spend the majority of your career as a plant pathologist assisting golf courses with their problems?

Answer: Absolutely not. I grew up in a working-class home and none of my family played golf. In those days, where I lived, the only opportunity to play golf was at a country club that required a membership. My folks did not have the income for that with three children. I was always interested in biology and I was in a pre-med program in college, but when I graduated I decided not to pursue medicine and applied for a job as a technician in forest pathology at the University of Arkansas. I had really gotten interested in botany in college. I got a call from the university about the job but instead got recruited for graduate school. My work in turf came along as a research project studying ways to control thatch with wood-decay fungi.

Question: After all these years of working with golf courses, do you wish you had played more golf or perhaps taken golf lessons?

Answer: Yes, I would like to be a better golfer. I did take a few lessons at the urging of Dr. John Pitner, the former director of the Pee Dee Research and Education Center. He and I would go play at the Cheraw State Park Golf Course occasionally and it was fun. I think my handicap index was about 25. I just didn't have the time to play more and improve. Maybe I will play more golf in retirement, but the time is approaching when I may need the forward tees.

Question: Where do you plan to spend the majority of your time after you retire?

Answer: My wife and I will stay in South Carolina for sure. I plan to do some contract research and participate at Clemson as an emeritus professor. I also may help out in some way as a volunteer. I also plan to indulge my hobbies, do some traveling with my wife and see if she can train me a good Airedale Terrier for hunting.

Southeast Region Agronomists:

Steve Kammerer, regional director - skammerer@usga.org

Chris Hartwiger, director, USGA Course Consulting Service- chartwiger@usga.org

Patrick M O'Brien, agronomist - patobrien@usga.org

Todd Lowe, agronomist - tlowe@usga.org

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