Congressional C.C. goes to great lengths to handle heavy rain

An extremely wet summer was not conducive to maintaining golf courses in the East and Midwest last year. It meant that superintendents had to go the extra mile to provide playable conditions. That was much the case at the prestigious Congressional Country Club, where U.S. senators and congressmen, and business leaders, are among 1,700 playing members.

"Last season started out as a super summer because there wasn’t any humidity,” notes superintendent Bill Black, who’s been at Congressional for 13 years. “But it turned out to be an extremely wet and humid summer.”

When conditions are wet for any length of time, certain problems are sure to pop up, as they did at the Congressional:

- "Cutting to almost 1/8th of an inch can have an effect on golf courses,” notes Black. "We end up having certain diseases and algae." He uses Fore, Manzate and Dithane, along with heavier doses of Daconil. "They don’t control the diseases, but they check it," he says.

A disease-related problem particular to the Congressional was drainage. Sand bunkers became black-layered because of all the moisture, which plugged up drainage. So Black’s crews had to dig up all the sand and clear the drains.

- "There are days you have to restrict golf cars, too,” Black further notes. "We didn’t allow golf cars over Labor Day Weekend. It’s not something we like to do, but the members are generally pretty considerate.”

- Bunker washouts are the most difficult problem to deal with. “Fridays, the bunkers are in great condition and you’re ready for the weekend,” he says. “and then a big storm hits on Friday night. It’s impossible to get them back in shape.”

He noted that workers once spent 50 man-hours on a Saturday pushing sand back up into the bunkers, “and you couldn’t tell we did anything.”

Despite summer’s rains, Black and his crews kept Congressional Country Club’s ryegrass and bermudagrass fairways and Pennlinks greens the envy of area golfers. It has been the site of seven Kemper Opens and will host the 1995 U.S. Senior Open and 1997 U.S. Open. It is also (former) Vice President Dan Quayle’s home course.

Black, a Penn State University gradu-
ate, has been on golf courses virtually his whole life. As a five-year-old boy, his back-
yard and playground was Hershey (Pa.)
Country Club. He was superintendent at
Fountainhead Country Club in
Hagerstown, Pa., for 13 years before com-
ing to Congressional. He has easily adapt-
ed to his current surroundings.

"We have 500 acres I can roam around
on," he says. "It's difficult to hide in your
own world any more as a golf course
superintendent, anyway.

"The exposure I have with a different
cross-section of people is something I
value very much. In a normal job, you
don't get to meet doctors, lawyers and sen-
ators.

"You get a nice, crisp day when the sky
is blue, the grass is green...there's nothing
like it."

—Jerry Roche

Management practices, not turf species,
are key at this 'course of a different texture'

'Zoysia...a good grass for
both high and low handi-
cappers...has a kind of
bounce to it,' says Dick
Stuntz.

- What might work for one golf course
superintendent might not work for anoth-
er. Likewise, what might work for main-
taining one type of turfgrass might not
work for another.

Alvamar Country Club in Lawrence,
Kansas, is perhaps the prime example of
this golf course truism. There, superinten-
dent Dick Stuntz maintains zoysiagrass
fairways and Cohansy bentgrass greens,
two highly unusual grasses for this part of
mid-America.

Yet, using state-of-the-art management
practices, Stuntz has shaped Alvamar's 18
country club holes into one of the finest
and most-honored courses in the nation.

"Alvamar has had zoysia fairways and
tees since its inception in 1968," notes
Stuntz, "so it was a major concern to
change the grasses I was tending when I
came here in 1983." He credits his zoysia
education to Roger Knoll, the superinten-
dent at Old Warson in St. Louis. "I took a
zoysia lesson from him," Stuntz says. "It
took some time and work."

The most difficult aspect of having
zoysia is not its maintenance but its
establishment—from sprigs, not seed or
sod. Yet the positives—at least here, 30
miles west of Kansas City—far outweigh
the negatives.

"Zoysia has a kind of bounce to it,"
Stuntz says, ticking off a number of favor-
able characteristics. "Its dormant play is
much better than bermudagrass. It's a
golden dormant color. It's a good grass for
both high and low handicap players
because it's coarser and the ball sits right
up on top of it."

Cohansy is, Stuntz says, "a very
sensitive bentgrass." It is finer-bladed and more
upright, and it has a more consistent tex-
ture than Penncross, the accepted indus-
try standard, Stuntz observes. Though
Cohansy is highly pythium-tolerant, pesti-
cides mixed from emulsifiable concen-
trates (ECs) will damage it, he continues.

The zoysia fairways and tees are
mowed at 7/16ths of an inch. The
Cohansy bentgrass greens are mowed at
6/64ths of an inch to provide stimpmeter
readings approaching 10, even for the
Kansas Open, which has been played at
Alvamar since 1975.

"The demand for faster greens has
made our profession more of a profes-
sion," Stuntz says. "It's all relative, but the
expectation of the golfer from 1967 until
today is like two different ballgames. If
this course were maintained like courses
of the early to middle 1970s, I'd get run
out of town."

He blames televised golf tournaments
and the advent of the stimpmeter, which
can quantitively measure green speed, for
golfers wanting faster green speeds.

This demand has necessitated lower
cutting heights, which in turn causes an
increase in Poa annua infestation.
Stuntz's answer to poa encroachment
might be applications of Scott's TGR, a
turfgrass growth regulator that has
shown in university tests to affect poa.

"But Cohansy is very sensitive, and
Scott's TGR is touchy stuff," the veteran
superintendent notes. "So I'm going to
be right there when we do the mixing
and applications."

The Alvamar complex (which also fea-
tures an 18-hole public course with anoth-
er 18 holes on the drawing board) main-
tains a three-acre Cohansy nursery.

Owner/president Bob Billings, who
played basketball at the University of
Kansas with Wilt Chamberlain, keeps com-
munication lines open—out of necessity.
One of the country club's members is
David Robinson of the NBA's San Antonio
Spurs, who owns a home along one fair-
way. He and other basketball stars, like
Chicago's Michael Jordan, play some of the
30,000 rounds at Alvamar each season.
And the adjacent public course plays host
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