

OPEN LETTER
TO MID-WEST ASSOCIATION OF GOLF
COURSE SUPERINTENDENTS

Dear Mr. Superintendent:

From Monday, July 12, through Wednesday, July 14, I had the good fortune to visit several golf courses in the Chicago area, and the further pleasure of speaking to your group about our turfgrass problems in the West.

I will always be indebted to Ray Gerber, Don Strand and Bob Williams for their thoughtfulness in acting as hosts during each of the three days. Their willingness to transport me over the countryside enabled me to get a true picture of turf conditions on both private and public fee courses. Needless to say, I couldn't have picked a more adverse time for good cool-season grass growth. Temperatures were in the high 90's and humidity was near the precipitation point. Yet with mother nature pulling out all the stops in order to make it tough for you fellows, I was able to see perfection in golfing turf.

In reviewing the tour my most favorable impressions relate to the degree of grooming; tees clipped at putting green height; and analytical questions from superintendents who are constantly striving to find the answer to their turf problems, and thus provide better golfing turf for increased golfer satisfaction. It is doubtful if any professional group in the nation can closely approach the superintendents in their selfless goal of striving to increase the pleasurable leisure hours of our bosses, the golfers.

I couldn't help but see that many of your problems were similar to those faced by our western superintendents. I felt right at home in discussions covering *Poa annua*, crabgrass, water management, diseases and accepted management practices. To my mind, basic soil-moisture-grass relationships are the same regardless of where one is located. It is for this reason that a Los-Angeles superintendent may have an answer for a Chicago problem, and practices that were devised by Chicago superintendents are finding wide acceptance in the Northwest. One has only to look at Norm Johnson's success in Florida to appreciate that there are no geographical boundaries large enough to interfere with sound basic turfgrass knowledge.

Of all the turf culture subjects discussed, possibly *Poa annua* received the most attention. For this reason I am taking the liberty of mentioning a few management practices that are enabling some of our western courses to gradually eliminate annual bluegrass from the pest category.

Poa annua must outgrow bentgrass during some portion of the growing season if it is to become a problem. With us, this period falls during cool wet weather of winter to early summer, depending on location and the season. During this time we avoid fertilizing with water soluble sources of nitrogen and the use of aeration tools. It seems to us that when *Poa* is outgrowing bent regardless of what we do, aeration to encourage deeper rooting plus readily available nitrogen to stimulate growth, would further help *Poa* to crowd out the more desirable bentgrasses. Since our golfers demand good early season color we keep a stronger feeding program going during hot weather when *Poa* is at a low ebb and only the bentgrass can respond. We find this not only gives early spring color due to a residual effect, but also prevents *Poa* from germinating because our bentgrass is dense in the fall.

Since climatic conditions are decidedly difficult to judge in advance, we favor making our earliest fertilizer application with a true organic material. We do this because there seems to be a direct correlation between availability of organic nitrogen and the start of the bent growing season. Thus, if we misjudge the weather, and it continues to remain cool and wet, the organic nitrogen does not react to stimulate *Poa*. All is not lost, by the way, in applying true organics under adverse conditions for their release. They merely lie in wait for warmer weather.

We have also found that lead arsenate is a good inhibitor of seed germination as long as phosphate levels are not excessive. Courses that have continued to use a little lead each year, and have avoided the constant use of complete fertilizers high in phosphoric acid, have little trouble with *Poa*.

Management techniques of value to us during *Poa* season include frequent cup changes to distribute traffic; sodium arsenite to prevent seedhead formation; use of sterilized topdressing; and holding off on early broad leaf weed control to prevent *Poa* from germinating in the voids where the weeds are killed.

Other techniques worthy of consideration during Bent season would be watering as deeply and infrequently as possible; aeration where needed to encourage deeper rooting; and starting the renovation program early in the season. We have noticed that the normal time of seeding bent into renovated fairways often coincides with the fall germination of *Poa*. Thus it is possible to have *Poa* emerge first and crowd out the bent. We believe that it might be better to seed bent earlier in the season when temperatures are too hot for good *Poa* germination.

In order to help you do a better job of fighting *Poa*, we placed a research grant at the University of Illinois this year. In the near future we plan to establish a regional Green Section office in the Mid-West, and would appreciate the views of the Chicago Area superintendents concerning such a move. The United States Golf Association's new program of Green Section decentralization to provide better service to its member clubs through closer cooperation with the individual Golf Course Superintendent is working well in the West. It should be equally, if not more effective, in Chicago because of the large number of golf courses in a limited geographical area. With the full support of Chicago clubs, each applicant for Regional Turf Service would have the full time help of a turfgrass Agronomist who would be available almost immediately for special request visits in addition to the regular yearly visit. As with all USGA activities this service is provided at or below cost and one fee covers everything. For an 18 hole, 300 member private club, it amounts to 33-1/3 cents per member per year. More complete detail is available from USGA "Golf House", 40 East 38th Street, New York 16, New York, or locally through Mr. John D. Ames, Vice President USGA, 135 South LaSalle Street, Chicago 3, Illinois.

In closing, I wish to again thank the Mid-West Association of Golf Course Superintendents for making my visit an enjoyable and memorable occasion. Your USGA Green Section cannot effectively exist for our common goal of providing better turf for better golf without the support of the golf course superintendent.

Sincerely

Yours for Better Golfing Turf,

Charles G. Wilson

Western Director, USGA Green Section