

Future of Golf Course Grass

I have been asked to look into the future of golf course grass and do some guessing as to what changes we might see in the next twenty years.

It seems inevitable that many new strains of grass will come and go in the next two decades. There is considerably more breeding and selection underway in Blue grass, Fescues and Rye grass than there has been in the past and although the 1930's saw more selection being done with the Creeping Bents there are numerous strains of this grass in test plots around the country.

From this activity there will be numerous strains to pick from and both from the selection work of the originator and practical experience, grass should be available for very specific use areas. Such conditions as shaded locations, heavy traffic areas, droughty hillsides, low moist areas, and possibly much better defined geographical and climatic areas of adaption.

New material is being produced and distributed for testing, but it is in the testing of new strains that I believe the greatest change will be seen.

Procedures for testing are varied today. New varieties showing promise developed by public experiment stations are distributed to other such stations for additional evaluation. This work is done on relative small plots in areas generally of limited traffic. Commercial breeders are confining most of their testing to plots under their control and supervision. The link that is missing is wide spread testing under practical conditions and use.

The pie greens established in the late 30's at many golf courses for the purpose of evaluating creeping bents collected by the Greens Section of the USGA was a very useful method of screening. It would seem that a similar program could be organized in the years to come, for who is better equipped to maintain such plots and capable of practical evaluation than a Golf Course Superintendent.

A program such as this would have numerous aspects, needing careful thought and planning. Two that immediately present themselves are: Who bears the cost of such a project and, How are the proprietary interests of the developers or breeders protected? Two recently formed National Associations, The Commercial Plant Breeders and The Sod Producers could be a factor in working out details.

Fairways should see the most dramatic change in the coming years. There are several blue grasses under test today that are demonstrating the ability to perform well at mowing heights under one inch. The unanswered problem with these grasses today is how to selectively control creeping bent. None of the blue grasses are good competitors against bent, especially under the conditions, adequate moisture and short mowing, of a modern fairway. We must look to the chemist for this answer, but because of the extreme differences in these grasses it seems very probable that it will be forthcoming, and the next twenty years will see fairways that match the excellence of our modern greens.

Some of these new blue grasses selections will undoubtedly find their way to tees and do a better job than the grasses available today, but although there is promise in some grasses of being able to stand the foot traffic on a tee, there is little to encourage one to think we may someday have a grass

capable of resisting the onslaught of a husky man armed with an iron club. The answer probably lies in larger tees and grasses capable of rapid recovery from injury.

Finally the coming years should see gradual improvement in the year round density and disease resistance of the grasses used on sports areas. This should be accompanied by a gradual reduction of our reliance on chemicals for weed and disease control. Combine progress in this area, with a better understanding of growing media to avoid compaction, relief from thatching through varietal improvement as well as equipment innovations such as removal of clippings and dead grass leaves simultaneously with the mowing, we should see a trend in the coming years of progress being measured in terms of simplification rather than reverse tenet that complexity equals progress.

Warrens Turfs Nursery
By Ben Warren

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

New Brunswick, New Jersey

Rutger's four-year undergraduate program leads to a B.S. from the College of Agriculture and Environmental Science. Students follow the plant science curriculum and take their electives in turf management subjects. The program is directed by the Office of Resident Instruction, with Dr. Ralph Engel, Professor of Turf Management, as principal teacher and student advisor.

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