

THE DEMISE OF TORONTO C-15 CREEPING BENTGRASS

In 1959, my first year at Silver Lake Golf Club, we watched the snow melt in April and expose thirty dead greens. This was the most opportune time to start a rebuilding program. Raymond Didier, retired superintendent at Tam-O-Shanter C.C., was contracted to design and build three greens each season, after Labor Day week-end. Between October 1959 and October 1971 we rebuilt 28 putting greens. All were sodded with Toronto C-15 Bentgrass. These greens performed satisfactorily, except for occasional vandalism, until the Spring of 1981.

In August 1971, I established a one acre bentgrass nursery for patching and emergencies. Warren's Turf Nursery stolonized the area using a hydromulch tank truck. Our C-15 nursery looked fine for the first three years. When the putting greens at Butler National started to sour with a strange disease about 1974, Ben Warren financed a study by the people at the University of Illinois. Their testing site was the nursery at Silver Lake. Dr. Bill Meyer found that feeding the diseased turf with soluble nitrogen aided recovery. Dr. Malcolm Shurleff after many tedious hours concluded that of all the fungicides tested none were doing the job. If he had to select just one it might be Acti-Dione.

This season the "blue ribbon" committee composed of Prof. H. Couch, P. Larsen, and D. Wehner conducted more tests on this same nursery site. By midsummer the testing of 21 fungicides was scrapped as ineffective. All efforts were devoted to the anti-biotics. Meanwhile our tired old nursery had been ravaged with the disease and was nothing more than a weed infested Poa Annua patch. I suggest that the anti-biotic trails be done on some of the C-15 greens of our South Course. Of the drugs applied each week by David Wehner, Mycoshield, a Pfizer product with 17% oxytetracycline warranted further testing.

March 1981 gave us warm dry weather and all the golf courses were rolling and mowing greens for the first time. Everything at Silver Lake came through the winter in super shape. The last days of March we had some Spring thundershowers. When I mowed the South Course greens for the second time, they were not lush and green but ... orange! Ed Fischer responded to my phone call, and confirmed that we did indeed have the dreaded "red leaf spot". The infected greens No. 1, 4, 6, and 16 on the South Course were all built in Fall of 1968 and sodded with Warren's C-15 from the farm in Sullivan, Wisconsin. Fisher's parting remarks were, "Smith, if you don't want an ulcer and sudden gray hair then plow the ----- up".

Ben Warren was gracious to come over for several hours and survey the situation. Ben said this definitely doomed Toronto C-15 bentgrass commercially, and left only the seeded bents for the future. A rushed "summit meeting" was called at Silver Lake and these were our decisions: 1. Try to control the spread of the disease, mow less frequently, raise the nitrogen level, isolate the machines mowing the infected greens, and stay on top of the situation and correspond with the University people.

2. Since we had never had any success overseeding existing bentgrass greens; and since to close the course late in the season, fumigate, and seed was risky; we were committed to sod the diseased greens in September after the tournaments concluded. In May I drove to the H & E Sod Farm in Mommence, Illinois to

check their bentgrass supply. They had several acres of beautiful Penneagle, but it was all reserved for Joe Dinelli at North Shore. I claimed the remaining acreage of Penncross for Silver Lake, and returned swiftly with a deposit check. Unfortunately for all the other Chicago golf courses, this depleted the bentgrass sod supply for 1981.

Our efforts to control the disease were futile. We rated all 28 of our Toronto greens weekly on a scale of 1 to 10. 1 or 2 meant totally ravaged; 10 meant near perfect only a few ballmarks. On June 17th on the South Course we had six greens with scores **under 5**, twenty rated perfect 10. On July 4th eight greens scored **under 6** seven greens held at perfect 10, but ... the disease had invaded two of our North Course greens. On August 12th only seven of the total twenty eight rated a 5. Hey! They were "coming back" or was it just an illusion? Poa Annual filled in the diseased areas rapidly. The putting surfaces were bumpy and untrue. On June 13th we had 2.5 inches of rain, our evaluation scores read the poorest on June 17th. On July 28th and August 3rd, we had rains of 1.3 inches that gave us poor scores on August 3rd. Saturated soils and pore space accent the disease.

Getting back to the use of the drug oxytetracycline. We followed all the recommendations at the time. We applied the material at dusk, we used 8 lbs. per green, we applied 300 gallons of water per green to wash it in, and we did not mow the treated turf the next day. But this took us one hour per green, and limited us to treating five greens a night. It would take us all week for a single application. (Besides, there is no one to talk with at 2:00 A.M. except mosquitos). We used the 300 gallon drench method to all 28 greens the week of June 8th. In 1981 we consumed over twenty five drums of Mycoshield. For you cost conscious superintendents that's \$3,500 without the overtime labor and we still had our Pythium, Helmithosporium, and the Dollar Spot treatments to make as well.

My concluding thoughts for my peers to digest:

1. Don't get excited about Tetracycline as **THE CURE** yet. We don't know how much to put on for sure, and whether to apply it monthly or at each outbreak. Must we drench the material in? What are these anti-biotics doing to the beneficial bacteria working in the soil?
2. By all means, establish yourself a bent nursery for future emergencies, disease or vandalism. The sod growers, like the new owners of Warrens, may not produce creeping bent because of the costs involved.
3. Start your public relations **now** with the green committee or executive board. Those three or four Toronto C-15 greens that you have may succumb in 1982.
4. **Pray, that the two research teams** (H. Couch, P. Larsen, and D. Wehner), **and** (J. Vargas and D. Roberts) **cease their idiotic rivalry to see who is No. 1. Pass the peacepipe. Share their trade secrets and scientific breakthroughs. Save the remaining beautiful Toronto C-15 putting greens in Chicago. Save us our jobs!**

Dudley Smith

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Contact: Larry Horrell, Shamrock Golf Club, 815 — 937-9355.
