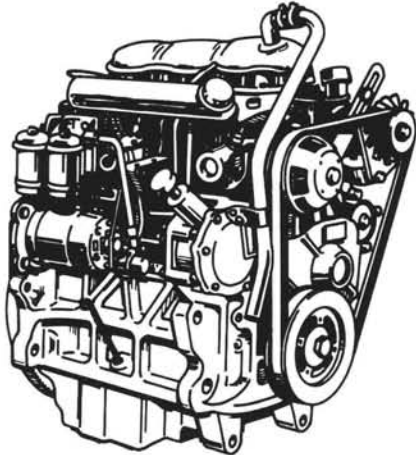


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In Defense of Kentucky Bluegrass Fairways

by Dudley Smith, Silver Lake C.C.

We are gathered here today to pay homage to old Kentucky. I never expected to speak with expertise about the bluegrass fairways at Silver Lake. As a matter of fact, there is more criticism of our fairways than any facet of our operation; unless it be the pin locations.

This challenge was accepted for two reasons:

1. I hate Poa annua. I was schooled that poa annua is a weed both in putting surfaces and as a fairway turf. I never intend to culture this pest as a perennial fairway carpet.

2. All of us grew up hitting the golfball off sparse weedy bluegrass fairways, today's hybrid bluegrass-ryegrass fairways are a luxury to behold. Watching country clubs cater to the whims of a few low-handicap golfers, and convert their fairways to bentgrass-poa turf, burns me up! Golfers who shoot over 85 and that includes most women golfers, cannot navigate bent fairways. Millions of us sweep the ball from the turf, rather than punching out a divot. The cost and maintenance of bentgrass is not our topic today.

The finest bluegrass fairways that I have played in our area are (alphabetically) Aurora CCC, Briar Ridge CC, Danville CC, Deer Creek CC, Prestwick CC, and Turnberry CC. I consulted the superintendents to learn their management secrets.

Carl Hoppman's philosophy surprised me. "You must change your priorities and lift the fairway standards to the same level as your putting greens. We check our greens daily for disease, local dry spots, putting speed; the day is here to evaluate our fairways with the same esteem. Call it Tender Loving Care, it's a habit we must assume." (Incidentally, never ask Carl Hoppman a question unless you have 30 minutes to listen to his reply.)

Superintendents from these courses fertilized their fairways heavily. As a rule 4 lb. nitrogen per thousand sq. ft. annually. Four applications a year including a late or dormant feeding was the norm. The materials preferred were slow release IBDU, sulfur coated urea, and some straight urea for the late feeding. Sulfate of potash rates exceeded the nitrogen levels. 6-8 lb. potassium per thousand annually was not uncommon.

For bluegrass to be acceptable on fairways it must support the golfball. Turf density is the key. Fairways should go into dormancy thick and healthy. Skimping, saving the fertilizer dollar for next year's spring application means thin turf, dandelions and clover, and susceptibility to leafspot.

A. Fertilization

Soil tests taken in 1987 indicated that the pH of the fairways at Silver Lake was 6.5-7.0. The fairways were deficient in calcium and sulfur. We apply high calcium limestone from Pontiac, Illinois at the rate of 2 Ton per acre every three years.

In 1987 we fertilized fairways twice in the summer. 22-0-22 in June and 24-4-12 in August, both feedings at 200 lb. per acre or 1 lb. nitrogen per thousand. The October feeding was 8-4-24 at 300 lb. per acre. The annual total was 2.8 lb. nitrogen and 4.0 lb. potash per thousand.

In 1988 fairways were fertilized three times in the summer, May, July, and late August with 15-0-30 at 180 lb. per acre, or 0.6 lb. nitrogen per thousand each application.

In November the dormant feeding was 21-2-20 sulfur coated IBDU at 250 lb. per acre or 1.2 lb. nitrogen.

This week we are spreading sulfate of potash at 180 lb. per acre or 2 lb. actual K per thousand.

The 1988 picture is 3.0 lb. nitrogen and 6.8 lb. potash per thousand.

The fairway fertilizer cost in 1988 was \$30,000.

B. Weed Control

When we finally had a drenching rain in September, the fairways were sprayed with Trimec at 1 qt. per acre for broadleaf weeds. I added an extra half pint of Banvel in the cart traffic area to clean up existing knotweed. September is the best time for our herbicide program. We have more experienced help available, and who knows, it may be too wet for the sprayrig in May.

C. Disease Control

The fungicide program for fairways is limited to leafspot control in April, with a repeat application two weeks later. In 1987 we used Acti Dione TGF at 1 oz. per thousand, 3 canisters per acre. In 1988 the control was Manzate 5 oz. per thousand with iron chelate added at 4 oz. per thousand. 10 gallons Manzate plus 8 gallons Ferrate in 400 gallons water covered 7 acres.

We have never sprayed our Kentucky bluegrass fairways for Pythium. The collars and approach area infested with poa annua do get spot sprayed with Subdue. Green banks and approaches were sprayed three times in July and August for Anthracnose. A combination contact and systemic, Daconil 2787 and Tersan 1991, was used. Areas that perished due to stress in late August were marked and resodded to bluegrass at our first opportunity.

D. Grub Control

In September 1986 we had terrible damage from raccoons and skunks burrowing for annual white grubs. In August 1987 we applied a Lesco pelleted fertilizer with Oftanol. I remember finishing the last four holes in the rain, so the material did get washed into the thatch layer. The only raccoon damage was in the rough where no product had been applied.

Dr. Roscoe Randall said the performance from Oftanol in 1987 was sporadic, so our timing was very lucky.

In 1988 we selected pelleted Turcam at 80 lb. per acre.

We delayed the application until September when rain was forecast. Damage this year was noticed on five fairways.

E. Irrigation

The fairway irrigation at Silver Lake is single row manual quick couplers. The par 3 holes are automated. Our fairway watering policy has been "only as needed" only when wilt and wheelmarks are apparent. In 1987 fairways were watered only 5 times.

In 1988 it was a different matter. In June, July, and August the fairways were watered once a week with 1½ hr. sets. It was possible to do some watering during the day as long as I limited it to one sprinkler per hole on par 4s and par 5s. Golfers will not pay money to walk through a car wash. This year with the roughs suffering and the trees drawing the moisture from the fairways, we had portable sprinklers running under the trees constantly.

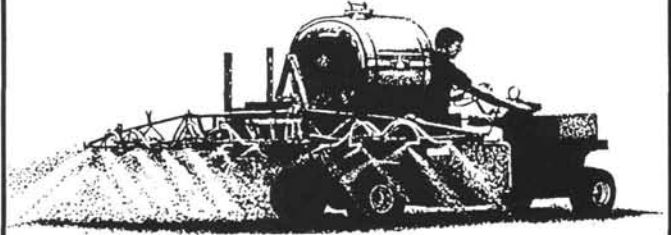
I believe in long infrequent sets on the fairways. We are not sprinkling for cosmetic appearance, or to keep the shallow rooted poa annua flourishing, but to keep the bluegrass steadily growing and free of stress.

F. Overseeding

Each August we try to supplement our fairways with new varieties. Starting back with Merion, then Scotts Windsor, most recently Columbia and Adelphi. The seeding is done in conjunction with fairway aerification. First the Dedoes aerify each fairway twice, and then the Rogers seeder slices in the new bluegrass. Truthfully the only new growth I have observed is when we have sowed perennial ryegrass. Remember Ben Warren's dwarf bluegrass sensation A-20? It was the answer to shorter fairways. If only Lee Trevino hadn't hit those "flyers" on national television. The A-20 was plugged into the virgin

(continued on page 11)

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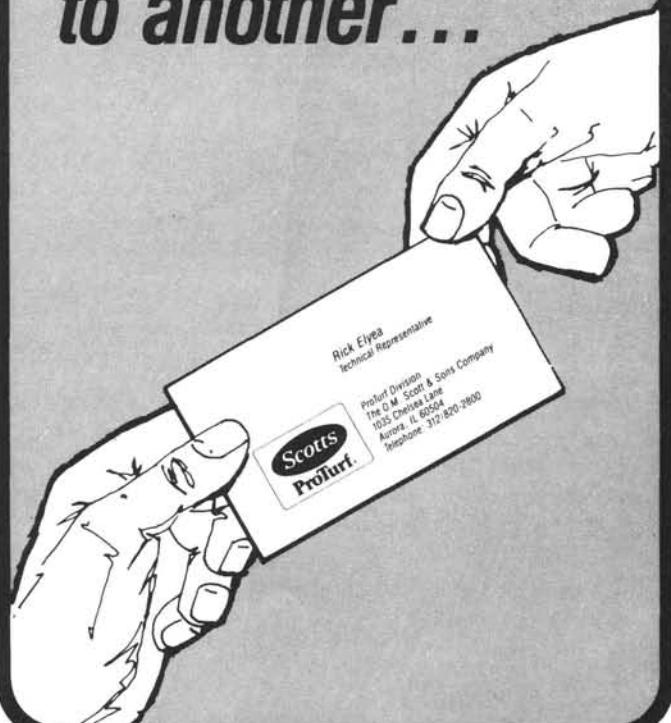
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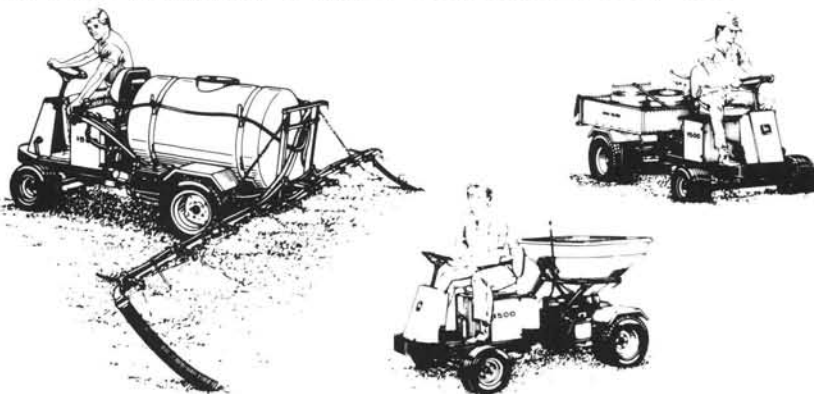
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fairways at Butler National on 4 inch centers. The nurse crop seeded was oats. The following year poa annua filled in the voids where the oats had been. Just suppose the nurse crop had been some of our new ryegrasses. The allelopathic reaction of the ryegrasses would have suppressed the germination of the poa annua seed.

G. Conditioning

In 1986 we narrowed and contoured the fairways on our South Course. The rough was allowed to reach 1 3/4 inch to accent the fairways. An expanse of rough was left in front of each tee for the golfers to carry. We found these alterations did NOT slow up play, in fact the golfers requested to play this course.

In 1988 the program was extended to all 45 holes. The rough was allowed to grow around the bunkers, and behind the greens Par 3 holes were all rough except for the approach area. Our fairway acreage had suddenly diminished to 70 acres.

H. New Equipment

May 1988 saw the arrival of new machines. It meant the immediate retirement of tractors pulling gang mowers. We decided to use the TORO 450 diesel, five gang, on the 12 South Course fairways. The two Ransome 350 diesels were delegated to the 15 North Course fairways. The Ransome 213 triplex mows collars and front approaches on the entire links. These machines were selected for their sturdiness not their weight. We discounted baskets for we had no intention of collecting grass clippings or poa annua seedheads.

The mowing height of the Ransome units is set at 1 3/16 inches, considering the weight of the Wiehle rollers out front, and the down-pressure exerted on the units by the hydraulic rams, the fairway grass is at a tight one inch.

The change in the golf course has been awesome. The uncut grass laid down by the tractor wheels has disappeared. The tall

grass that remained uncut in tile line depressions is now severed by the floating mowing units.

The old routine of mowing the entire golf course on Friday, and then resuming on Monday morning has been abolished. Golfers paying premium fees felt cheated on Sunday afternoons, their golfball nestled and hidden in bluegrass that hadn't been mowed since Friday morning.

We now mow at least five times a week, and that includes Saturday evenings. If dark sets in on Saturday before the backline is completed, the unfinished fairways are trimmed Sunday morning. The secret is to mow more frequently and remove less leaf blade.

This season we striped the fairways lengthwise for the weekend and mowed at various angles on the weekdays.

The person mowing collars and approaches with the triplex had a more difficult chore. There were yellow cart ropes to move, direction arrows to replace, sandtrap rakes in his way, etc. Two days were needed to complete collars and approaches, so these areas were groomed three times a week.

The investment this year of \$100,000 in modern equipment has been gratifying, complaints are seldom heard, an occasional compliment is forthcoming.

I mentioned earlier the finest bluegrass fairways in our area were at Aurora CC, Briar Ridge CC, Prestwick CC, and Turnberry CC. These courses had turf density, rich color, disease free, and groomed to the nth degree.

The sad truth is ... in each case these clubs have recently renovated and seeded their fairways to creeping bentgrass. The low-handicap minority has won another round.

Is the graffiti on the wall for bluegrass fairways?

Etched here at Silver Lake a granite headstone stands. It reads:

"Here lies old Kentucky Smith

His mother wanted him to be a dentist."