

Jimmy Blackledge Motivated Turfgrass Research in Florida

By DR. ROY A. BAIR



Dr. Bair

Jimmy first visited the Everglades Experiment Station branch of the University of Florida at Belle Glade in 1946. At that time we had some 1700 grasses and legumes from all over the world planted in 10 × 5 ft plots. Although these had been acquired primarily to find plant species which would put South Florida in the cattle business, Blackledge pointed out that many of the grasses were low growing types which ought to be mowed and evaluated for lawn and golf course usefulness.

When he then donated a greens mower and a park mower we replanted a hundred or so grasses in a separate turfgrass nursery and began to mow some of them daily, others once a week.

Dr. Fred V. Grau of the USGA Greens Section then entered the picture by extending a modest grant of money and by sending us all the bentgrass varieties then available.

By 1950 we had a total of 408 grasses in our plots under a regular mowing schedule. These included 120 bermudagrass strains, 60 bents, 20 zoysias, 17 St. Augustinegrasses, and 11 bahias. The large number of bermudagrasses was the result of our spending many self-financed weekends visiting golf courses to look for volunteer strains of the seeded grass which appeared to be "different".

By this time we had also accomplished our primary mission of finding grasses for South Florida cattle. There were now 40,000 head in Palm Beach County, as contrasted with fewer than 1000 ten years earlier, mostly because of the usefulness of the new Pangolagrass and Roselawn St. Augustine.

As a direct spin-off of the grass testing program for cattle, and Jimmy Blackledge's encouragement, we were able in 1950 to release several new turfgrasses which for a time

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March, 1946. James L. Blackledge and Dr. Roy A. Bair at Everglades Experiment Station, Belle Glade, Florida, standing on land planned for more turfgrass experimental plots.

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were improvements on the old Arizona seeded bermudas:

- For lawns
 - Roselawn St. Augustine
 - Paraguay Bahia
- For golf courses, bermudas
 - Greens
 - Everglades 1
 - Everglades 3
 - Bayshore
 - Fairways
 - Ormond

Several years later Gainesville released one of the St. Augustine bitter blue accessions from our Belle Glade nurseries, giving it the name "FLORATINE". We obtained this in the mid-forties from the Blossom Estate in Palm Beach.

Several "Firsts" may be of historical interest:

1946. The first ANNUAL TURFGRASS FIELD DAY was held in Belle Glade at the experimental grass nurseries in October.

1946. Before 2,4-D was given this abbreviated name we reported killing creeping charlie (matchweeds) and water hyacinths with it — the first use of this herbicide in Florida.

1947. TROPICAL TURF TIPS, probably the first monthly turfgrass publication in the U.S., was instituted in March. An amazing 89 of 100 golf course superintendents who got



Turfgrass observational plots at Everglades Experiment Station, Belle Glade, 1947.



Strains of Bermuda Grass at the Everglades Experiment Station, Belle Glade, 1947. Left to right: St. Lucie, Davie strain from Davie, Fla.; giant strain from Clewiston, Fla.; fine leaf strain from Key West, Fla.; fine leaf selection.

Soil Conservation Service Photo by Paul Tabor

this first edition wrote to request their names be put on a mailing list. Three months later this list had grown to 300.

1947. The First Annual Turfgrass Management Conference was held in Miami Beach in May. Subsequently these yearly meetings were held at St. Petersburg, Jacksonville, and Palm Beach.

1947. At the Indian Creek Country Club, Miami Beach, 206 grasses were planted in observational plots. Several bentgrass varieties lived over two years here.

1948. Before ALDRIN insecticide production was assumed by Shell Chemical, and even before it was named, we reported that on a tee infested with mole crickets at the Belle Glade 9-hole golf course, crickets were killed daily for 30 days following treatment.

1949. At Johnny Schabinger's Palm Beach Golf Club, we reported that TERSAN fungicide gave us more protection against Rhizoctonia fungus on ryegrass winter greens than did four other chemicals tested. We got the same results on the golf course at Belle Glade.

1950. Ammonium sulphate trials on greens at Belle Glade gave slightly better growth responses than did sodium nitrate, uramon or ureaform nitrogen.

Soluble fertilizer applied through greens irrigation proved fully as satisfactory as solid fertilizer applications.

1950. Test plots of up to 100 of the more promising turfgrasses had by now been established also at Ponte Vedra, a cemetery in West Palm Beach, and at branch experiment stations of the U of F at Homestead, Sanford and Leesburg.

ONE REGRET

We released ORMOND bermudagrass because of its immense vitality. If we had known how it would invade greens after planting only on fairways, we would probably have suppressed it.

Possibly 100 superintendents will attend the funeral of this investigator for the purpose of standing in line for the opportunity of planting Ormond on his grave.