

# Bardmoor greens staff beats ill-timed attack

BY PETER BLAIS

It was a small thing, but the type of thing that can cost a superintendent his job.

The Saturday before the J.C. Penney Classic (Nov. 30- Dec. 3) at Bardmoor Country Club in Largo, Fla., an assistant superintendent noticed a four-foot strip of browning grass on the fringe of the 11th green just before he headed home for the night.

Recognizing it immediately as pythium blight, assistant superintendent Steve Hritsko hustled back to the maintenance shed and returned with a treatment of Subdue (a fungicide).

The blight was contained, as was the embarrassment that could have resulted from a national television audience viewing the private course's green damage.

"We're lucky he just happened to notice it when he did," said head superintendent Frank Cook. "You can lose an entire green overnight to pythium. And it's easy to transfer from green to green. The spores attach themselves to a mower's wheels. You can lose all your greens in a couple of days."

Pythium is generally a problem seen on ryegrass courses in the North rather than the bermudagrass courses in the South. But a combination of circumstances set the stage for a near disaster at Bardmoor.

Ryegrass normally isn't seeded into Southern courses until early December. But it was done in mid-October, six weeks before the tournament at Bardmoor, to fill in a few heat-stressed greens for players and television cameras.

Fog and warm weather, typical midsummer conditions that combine to spawn pythium outbreaks in the North, led to the same

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Bardmoor Country Club Superintendent Frank Cook, left, checks an area of the 11th green infected by pythium blight just before last month's J.C. Penney Classic. Cook and assistants Steve Hritsko, center, and Pat Hansen corrected the problem before it had a chance to spread and disrupt play during the nationally-televised event.

result at Bardmoor.

Thanks to Hritsko's quick action, an embarrassing situation was averted. But there was no way of avoiding the problems that plagued the Largo course the year before, when a tropical storm downed 100 trees a week before the Classic.

"That was a horror story," remembered Cook. "We couldn't mow the fairways for five or six days. And when we finally did, we scalped some of the grass. Compared to last year, this was nothing."

The only other potentially serious problem Cook faced prior to this year's J.C. Penney tourney was a computer foul-up the week before that caused an irrigation sprinkler on the 15th green to stay on an extra 12 hours. Coupled with some heavy rains, the green absorbed a lot of water.

"It was a little messy," recalled Cook. "It

was soft all through the tournament. Saturday night (after the second round) was the first night we didn't need to use a roller to smooth it out. Unfortunately, it happened the day before we would have shut down the irrigation system and started hand-watering."

Last year's tropical storm a week before a major tournament was a tough way for Cook to begin his first year as head superintendent. The 43-year-old groundskeeper started as a laborer at Bardmoor in 1981 after a long career in the lawn care business.

"I was looking for a change," he said. "A friend of mine suggested I come out here when a job opened up. I got to know this business from the bottom up, eventually moving up to assistant foreman, foreman and assistant superintendent. When the head superintendent was offered the general

manager's job, I was offered the head job. I became the superintendent in January 1988."

Unfortunately for Cook, his second J.C. Penney Classic as superintendent will likely be his last. The mixed pairs tournament is moving to nearby Innisbrook GC in Tarpon Springs in 1990, bringing to an end a 12-year association with Bardmoor.

The change of venue has nothing to do with the Bardmoor course itself, explained Cook. The private course was simply unable to provide the on-site accommodations and banquet facilities available at a resort complex like Innisbrook.

"I'm sorry to see it go," said Cook. "It's a lot of work and there's a lot of nervousness. But it's worth it. It's kind of nice to see your course on national TV."

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