

Dr. Noel Jackson on dreaded dollar spot: No sure cure soon

By GORDON WITTEVEEN

Dr. Noel Jackson, from the University of Rhode Island, is known as the most technically knowledgeable turfgrass pathologist in North America. What many don't know, however, is that Jackson has had a life-long love affair with dollar spot. It started as an infatuation at the Bingley Sports Turf Institute in England where Jackson gained his early experience. But, the love affair really took off when he came to Rhode Island and started visiting northeastern golf courses.

Noel Jackson has collected samples of infected turf from golf courses in the northeast for years. He has also received samples sent in by golf course superintendents. At the laboratory in Rhode Island the samples are analyzed, but strangely, Jackson has never been able to identify the causal organism. Only once in the history of dollar spot has the causal organism been identified and that was in England. Jackson collected several samples of infected turf in North America, packed them carefully, and personally took these to England. At the Bingley Sports Turf Institute, he followed the same procedures exactly as had been done before, but only the spores from the English samples could be identified.

Jackson, who can rattle off the Latin names of every fungi imaginable like a fast talking salesman, is lost for words when it comes to dollar spot. Dollar spot in North America has no Latin name! One would think that a no-name fungus would behave accordingly, and practice its dirty work in obscurity. Far from it. The dollar spot disease continues to be the most devastating turf pest from Maine to Illinois and from Ohio to Quebec.

The dollar spot organism, according to Jackson, is a remarkably resilient fungus. It quickly develops a tolerance for most any pesticide that superintendents have used over the years to combat this pest. At one time dollar spot was considered to be a poor man's disease. Only those courses that could not afford fertilizer were infected by the disease. A quick application of nitrogen, and the grass would outgrow the dollar spot. That is no longer the case.

Both Cadmiun and Dyrene were effective fungicides for the control of dollar spot at one time. The fungus developed a resistance in short order and both chemicals have fallen by the wayside. A number of years ago the Dupont Company brought out the systemic fungicide Benomyl 1991. The company claimed that dollar spot would literally be wiped off the face of the

earth, or rather the face of all golf courses, just like 2-4D had eradicated broad-leaved weeds before. For a little while it seemed that Dupont had discovered a wonder chemical. Benomyl 1991, applied thousand square feet, effectively controlled dollar spot for a few years at first. Then, heavier rates were required to obtain the same results. Eventually the fungus developed resistance for even this wonder drug. Benomyl 1991 is now totally useless for dollar spot control

and has been taken off the market.

The contact fungicide, Daconil, was at one time effective for three week periods, but now only provides control for an 8-9 day time span. A good shot of mercury will do the trick anytime, either in the form of Calo-clor, PMAS or Merfusan, but mercuries have been taken off the market as well.

Robert Feindt, superintendent at Country Club of Rochester in New York state, believes the dollar spot fungus attacks the turfgrass

over a longer time frame than it used to. According to Feindt, the fungus was once active only during the summer months. Nowadays, it is likely to show up in May, and there can be devastating outbreaks in September persisting into October.

Feindt advocates organics as a means of establishing healthy turf and preventing disease. Both Milorganite and Sustane are integral parts of his maintenance program. Like most superintendents worthy

of the name, he has practiced "integrated pest management" long before the phrase was invented and the practice became politically correct. Even Feindt finds it difficult to control dollar spot the organic way. He has had to resort to chemical methods and applies doses of Daconil at timely intervals.

"Will there ever be a cure for the dreaded dollar spot disease?" We posed that question to Noel Jackson and he laconically replied, "My bet is on dollar spot!"

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*Gordon Witteveen is superintendent at Board of Trade Country Club in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The above story first appeared in *Mainly Green* and has been reprinted with the author's permission.*

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