

GOLF COURSE NEWS

THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

A UNITED PUBLICATION
VOLUME 8, NUMBER 7
JULY 1996 • \$4.50

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Poa triv problems widespread & serious

By MARK LESLIE

Poa trivialis infestations of "epidemic proportions" are being reported in bentgrasses and some Kentucky bluegrasses, affecting golf courses across a broad portion of the United States. The question is, has it always been present?

A rough bluegrass, *poa trivialis* is "very aggressive," said Terry Buchen, The Legends Group director of agronomy. "It will take over bentgrass. Even when the seed is blue tag-certified, it's getting

through [inspections]."

"If you talk to the seed companies, the problem doesn't exist. But if you see new golf courses out in the field, it's absolutely a shame how much *poa trivialis* is there," said Stan Zontek, director of the U.S. Golf Association Green Section's Mid-Atlantic Region. "It's a huge problem. There are some supers who are fit to be tied."

"I totally disagree with Stan and his statement on [new golf courses]," said Dr. Rich Hurley, director of re-

search at Lofts Seed and perhaps the nation's foremost expert on *poa trivialis*. "You take me to 120 old courses and I'll find *poa triv* in fairways, greens and tees. I'm not saying it can't come in the seed, but it's all over. Take me anyplace from Georgia north, coast to coast, blindfolded and I'll find it and I'll find it quick."

"It's a hysteria pointed at the seed companies when, if there is a hysteria, it should be: 'This stuff is everywhere.'"

According to Zontek, the situation

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OB Sports: Turnkey managers

By PETER BLAIS

PORTLAND, Ore. — Bringing resort golf to urban areas is the goal of O.B. Sports, an Oregon-based, full-service management firm that recently began construction of a new golf project on the western outskirts of this city.

"We're focusing on high-end, public golf," said company President Orrin Vincent. "Country clubs and municipal courses have traditionally been the only choices in Western [U.S.] cities. We want to bring that resort golf experience to the city."

The 36-hole Reserve Vineyards and Golf Club, the fifth facility in the O.B. portfolio, is a good example. The Reserve will operate under an unusual format. Alternating each day, one 18-hole course will be dedicated to public/resort play with the other course reserved for private members and their guests.

The courses, which should open in August

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The 7th green at Rush Creek Golf Club, a John Fought design located in Maple Grove, Minn. Fought's design firm is now a division of Aurora, Ore.-based OB Sports.



PUBLIC GOLF FORUM

A NATIONAL BUSINESS CONFERENCE AND EXPO FOR SUPERINTENDENTS, OWNERS, MANAGERS, AND DEVELOPERS OF PUBLIC-ACCESS GOLF FACILITIES

OCTOBER • 27 • 29 • 1996

Forum focus: Customer service

By HAL PHILLIPS

CHICAGO — The golfers couldn't be happier. With more than 400 new courses opening their doors each year, there's an increasing variety of playing options. It's another story for the golf course management team, however, as record development numbers mean more competition in an already tight marketplace.

Sophisticated operations that emphasize customer service, manage efficiently, market aggressively and maintain for quality will thrive in this atmosphere, while those content with the *status quo* will fall by the wayside. The application of these sound business principles to public-access course operations will dominate the four-track education conference at The Public Golf Forum, a two-day seminar and trade show sponsored by

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Participation, rounds back up, says NGF

By HAL PHILLIPS

JUPITER, Fla. — That giant sucking sound you hear is actually a collective sigh of relief. According to the National Golf Foundation's (NGF) annual report on golf participation, rounds played increased 5.5 percent during 1995, pushing the total to 490 million. The report also shows the total number of golfers grew by 3 percent, pegging the current playing population at 25 million.

Following on the heels of last years study which indicated troubling decreases in both rounds and players, the 1996 report comes as welcome news to a golf industry building courses at a record pace. Four hundred and sixty-eight courses, an all-time high, opened for play dur-

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Poa trivialis is a foe, not a friend, for many in 'epidemic' regions

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has become more manifest in the last five years, with *poa trivialis*' growing popularity among Southern superintendents for winter overseeding. Seed companies have been growing more of it and it has in one way or another infested growing fields of bentgrass and bluegrass. The infestation is exacerbated in central Oregon where farmers flood-irrigate, thus washing the *poa triv* from one field into another.

"It doesn't take much *poa trivialis* to contaminate bluegrass or bentgrass," Zontek said.

Indeed, to test the aggressiveness of *poa trivialis*, Rutgers University researchers mixed 40 grams of *poa triv* seed in a 50-pound bag of "non-aggressive" Kentucky bluegrass and seeded a field. Three years later, the *trivialis* had taken over more than 50 percent of that bluegrass.

But Rutgers' Dr. Reed Funk tempered the issue, saying: "A lot of this hype on *poa triv* is real, a lot is hype. People learn to identify a new plant and immediately start saying it's a big problem. It's been here longer than you or I have."

Saying that bluegrasses imported from northwest Europe have, at least in the last 50 years, contained "large amounts" of *poa triv*, Funk added that today's turf-maintenance practices of high fertility, heavy irrigation and short mowing height have enhanced its presence.

"You'd be hard-pressed to find a bentgrass green where you don't find a little bit of *poa triv*," said Arman Suny, former superintendent and current general manager at Shadow Creek Golf Club in Las Vegas. Suny sings its praises as "a wonderful putting surface for overseeding," adding that any "problem" with it is one of aesthetics because it's shiny leaf makes it more noticeable.

But Zontek said: "The problem is that in a hot summer it can go dormant, or die and you have big patches of dead grass."

Finger-pointing and lawsuits are going on in courtrooms regarding "*poa triv*," but the immediate impact for golf course superintendents is how to eliminate the *triv* they already have on their courses. Funk reported that Rutgers found "certain herbicides do a reasonable but not complete job of removing [*poa triv*]."

Chipco Alliette reportedly is hard on *poa triv*. And superintendent Mark Delsantro of Wyncote Country Club in Oxford, Pa., said he is experimenting with Fore WP (wettable powder) on his greens and collars to figure out a rate to phytotoxically kill the *poa triv* without hurting the bentgrass. "If we do, we will be rich because we will patent the mix," he said.

Zontek said *poa triv* is more of a problem on newer golf courses, and Delsantro's fits that bill.

Wyncote CC opened in 1993 and when he came aboard Jan. 1, 1995, there was already a *poa triv* issue.

"I've had *poa triv* problems at every golf course I've been at," Delsantro said. "I did a ryegrass-to-bentgrass conversion at Brandywine Country Club [in Wilmington, Del.] and we had *poa triv* right from the start. Here [at Wyncote] it was prevalent.

"An untrained eye might not notice it. But when we look for inconsistencies we see a lot of it — most prevalent on our collars,

RELATED STORIES, PP. 31-33

but also in the fairways ... and even on some of the greens where we had 4- to 6-inch patches of it."

And the problem is not just in the world of seeding.

Berry Hills Country Club in Charleston, W.Va., bought Kentucky bluegrass sod for its greens and collars, and even the sod was contaminated with *poa trivialis*. "We put it in '92 and yanked it out last fall," said superintendent John Cummings.

The infected sod was a particular surprise because sod-quality seed — like that bought by Terra Sod owner Charlie Price, who sodded Berry Hills — is inspected to a higher degree than blue-tag seed.

Price and Berry Hills settled the case out of court, and Price now has litigation pending against his supplier, George W. Hill. Hill has, in turn, filed action against Olson Fennel, Turf Seed, Round Butte and Jacklin, which Price said has since been elimi-

nated as a source of the *poa triv*.

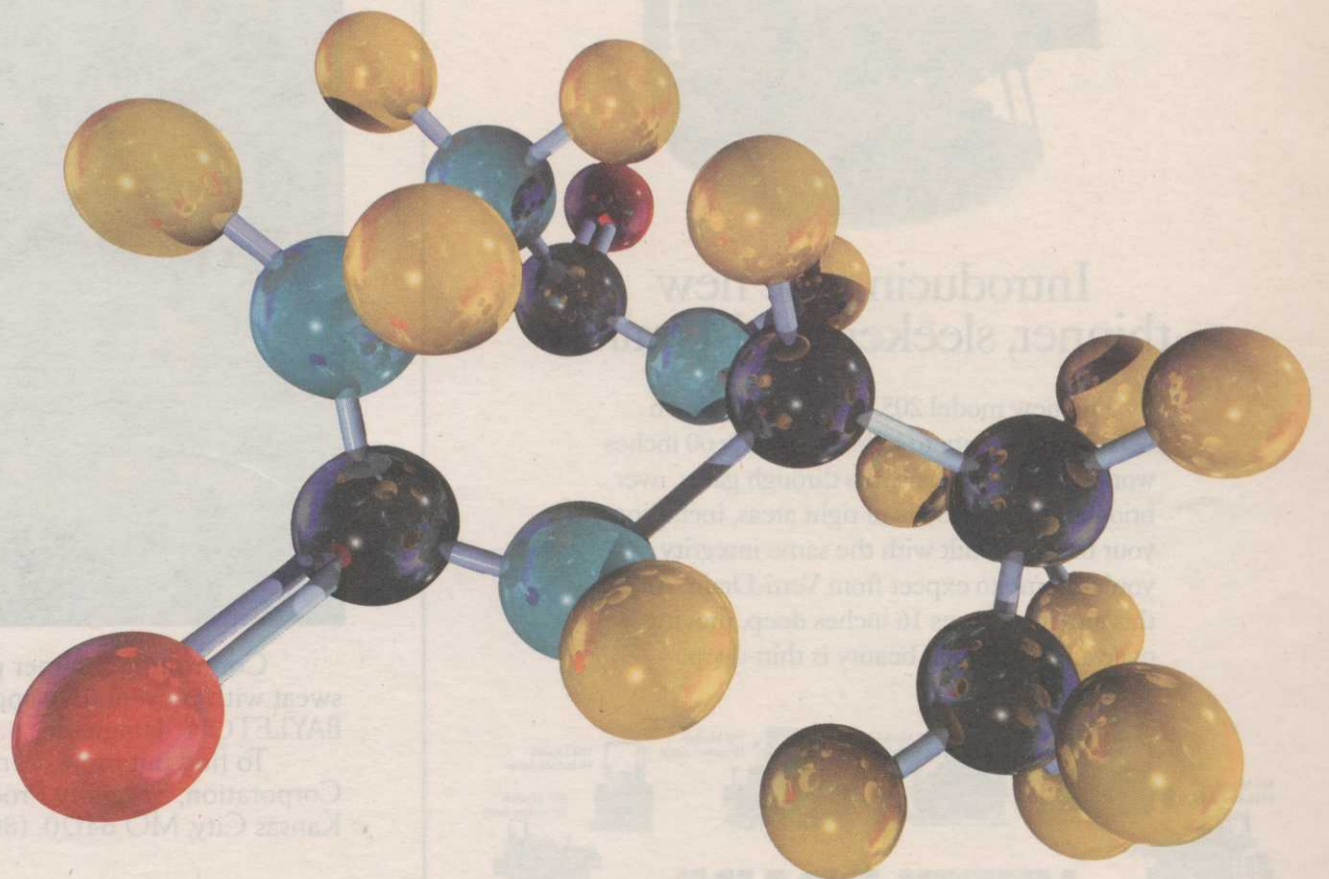
"I've heard quite a bit about *poa triv* problems since we had this," said Cummings. "It's opened my eyes."

The education is limited at this time, but multidimensional.

Beat *poa triv* before you get it, if possible, Zontek recommends. "If we have anything to do with a new golf course, we strongly recommend that they have independent seed tests done," said the USGA agronomist.

Continued on next page

WE'VE GOT QUALITY DOWN TO A SCIENCE.



By MARK LESLIE

LAS VEGAS, Nev. — While some Northern superintendents are anxiously battling *Poa trivialis* takeover in areas of their golf courses, the rough bluegrass can be used to advantage, according to Arman Suny.

A former superintendent and turfgrass consultant who is currently general manager at Shadow Creek Golf Club here, Suny said: "In Palm Springs some of the best overseeded greens are with *Poa trivialis*. It is a wonderful putting surface for overseeding. While it is 'a

'Use poa triv to your advantage' — Suny

weed,' it's not one I worry about. It doesn't affect the game of golf."

Indeed, Suny said *Poa triv* can be a problem-solver for spots on a golf course where it is difficult to grow turf.

"It's a grass we probably don't use enough," he said. "There are probably a lot of places we could use it. It's a great short-day grower and Kentucky bluegrass is not. So you've got a grass that in the spring and even into the fall will flat out-grow

Kentucky bluegrass. It will start growing before the cool-season grasses do — ryegrass included. It's a much more aggressive spreader than ryegrass. It starts earlier, grows later and moves faster laterally.

"So, in places where you've got limited daylight, or a lot of early-season golf when there's not much sun, it's a viable grass to look at.

He said he has used *Poa triv* in shade situations on collars. "Nobody notices," he said. "It's a

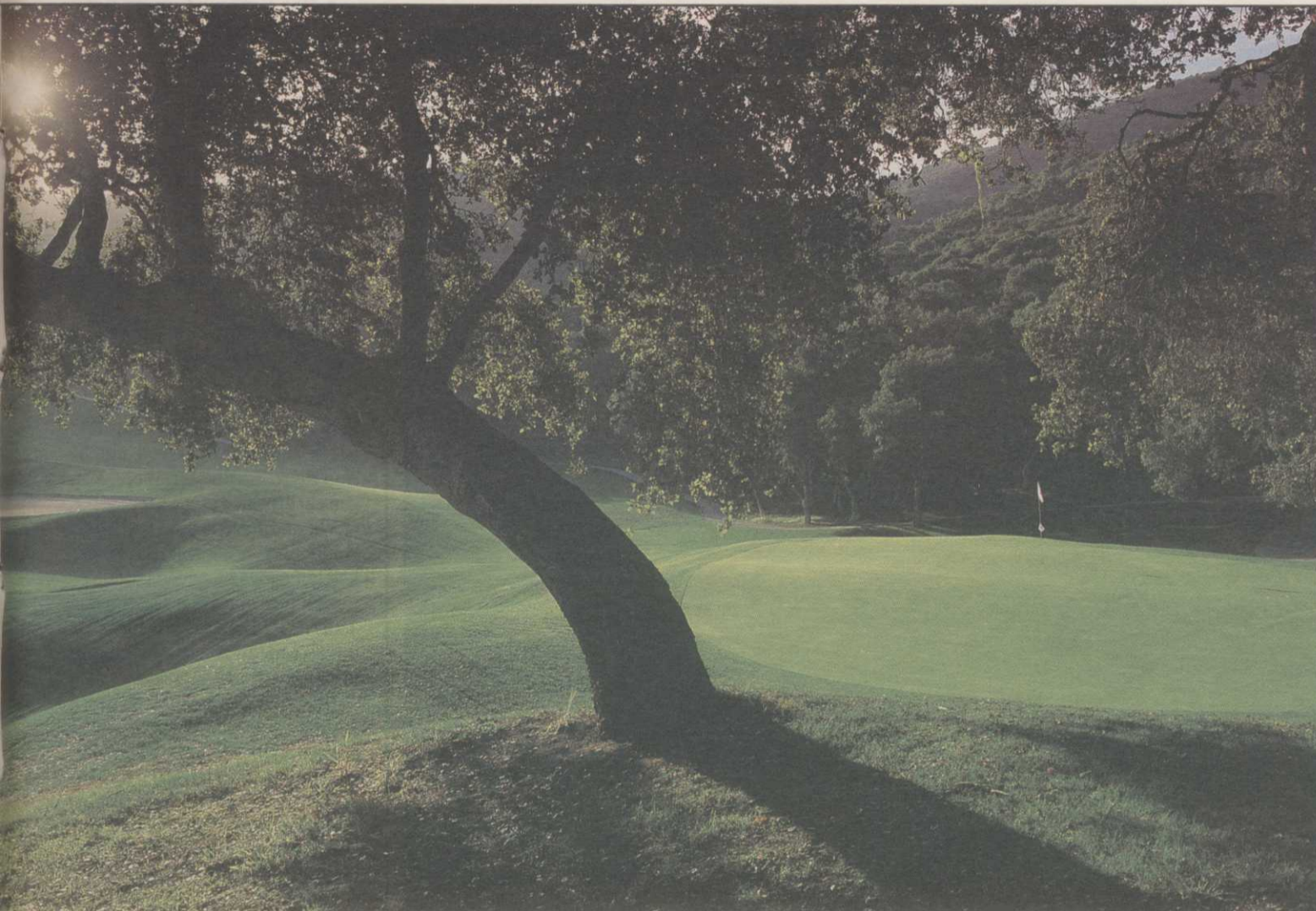
wonderful tool. If your percentage gets higher, you might have a problem with it on your greens."

Although superintendents have problems with *Poa trivialis* dying in some parts of the country, "in other areas it will never, ever die out," Suny said.

Referring to one-time mentor Richie Valentine at Merion Country Club outside Philadelphia, he said: "Richie taught me some tricks. One was, if you have a terrible, shady

green or tee and you can't grow anything on it, you could put *Poa triv* and Red Dot on it and just seed it once a month, and you could fake it pretty good. I had a green in Philly with *Poa triv* and Red Top. It didn't putt like the rest of them, but it was green and nobody noticed. We had grass on it when nobody else ever could."

Sometimes, he added, superintendents decide there is a problem with a pure agronomic situation even though it doesn't affect the game of golf. "If it doesn't, who's got a problem with it?" he asked.



Epidemic

Continued from previous page

"The blue tag-certified seed basically says what's in the bag is that variety. If you saw what is allowable in terms of weed-seed and crop-seed percentages, you'd die."

Dale Kern, owner of Seed Technology, an independent seed-testing laboratory in Marysville, Ohio, said the solution to the problem lies in "the buyers setting the standards."

State regulators certify blue-tag bentgrass seed by testing 2.5 grams of seed per lot. But a seed lot can have as many as 55,000 pounds of bentgrass.

"That's okay for the homeowner," Kern said, "but when you're planting a whole golf course, it is a different situation."

Kern said superintendents might want seed tested at 100 grams per lot, or even more. "But that can get expensive," he said, noting that the cost for a 50-gram check is \$150.

"On certified sod-quality Kentucky bluegrass, they check 10 grams only looking for *Poa annua*," he said. "For years we were running 100-gram samples. But that changed a couple of years ago. This year, we haven't had one request for a 100-gram test."

Terra Sod's Price said: "Quality control: A lot more seed testing needs to be done... The seed-testing labs did not have a lot of expertise in even identifying *Poa triv* seed. Now the problem is pretty evident and seed technicians are becoming more aware of the difference between *Poa triv* and bluegrass seed.

"Once they get a handle on that, I think they will begin to solve the problem... They obviously have to test more grams of seed. This lot [I bought] was 6,000 pounds. Ten grams of seed tested out of 6,000 pounds is suspect, to say the least."

And yet, as Hurley stated: "I'm not saying it couldn't come in with the seed. But if the conclusion is that there is a problem with *Poa trivialis* because of the seed companies and seed farmers, that is grossly simplified and not looking at the big picture. The big picture is: It is all over the place and has been for centuries."

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