

Buffalograss being used for 'accent' more than water-saver

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next to each other without problems."

Indeed, at two courses here — DC Ranch and The Raven Golf Club at South Mountain — superintendents speak of the aesthetics of buffalograss rather than its attributes of drought- and disease-resistance.

"We've used buffalograss as an accent turf," said Bob Clarkson, who is in his first summer at The Raven. "Ninety-five percent of the buffalo here is between tees and fairways and adjacent to common ar-

reas. We don't overseed it in the winter. It goes dormant and has dark brown contrast. In the summer the color is different than Bermuda and defines the hole."

"We like the contrast, the light green with the dark 419 Bermuda that we have everywhere else," concurred David Bergstrom at DC Ranch. "We have a different theory. We're maintaining it — mowing it at 2-1/2 inch height, and watering it fairly consistently. We're not dealing with it as though it is completely

drought-tolerant, but not using a lot of fertilizer, either."

DC Ranch also uses the buffalograss around the bunker faces. "Those come into play more often than not," Bergstrom said. "We did not want the ball to get caught up in the bunker sides."

He said buffalo can be allowed to grow "natural, 6 inches high and lazy, or tight and playable at higher maintenance levels."

Clarkson has seen some Bermudagrass

encroachment into the buffalograss areas in his 1-1/2-year-old course, and Bergstrom has not witnessed any in his 1-year-old track.

"Some of the perimeters have encroachment and contamination where clippings have blown in and established themselves," Clarkson said. "Over time, it will probably encroach quite a bit. We may treat it like poa annua and cut it out."

Clarkson said the situation, however, was exacerbated by poor-quality soil and the decision to not install irrigation for buffalograss areas. "I'm proposing to irrigate these areas," he said.

Riordan acknowledged the criticisms and said management practices determine the outcome of using buffalograss.

"With management it's possible to keep them separate," Riordan said. "In areas where hybrid Bermuda is getting mixed in with the buffalo at planting ... Bermuda becomes a weed in the buffalo and will take over. The bugaboo is when they plant plugs through a machine. The planting device for sprigging throws the sprigs, and so the two grasses get mixed in the process. They just need to be separate."

Riordan added that common Bermudagrass is not as aggressive in stands of rough and thus causes less of a problem as hybrids.

"One of the first courses Dye did was an installation problem, I thought," he added. "They had problems on installation. The first nine is a mess. The second looks pretty good. They took the care to keep them separated at planting."

Riordan said that if an area is overwatered, Bermudagrass will be much more aggressive. "But if it is kept a little drier — which I think roughs should be — Bermuda won't be as aggressive and buffalograss will grow quite well. This is something the superintendents will have to work out."

Researchers, he said, are trying to devise a way to keep Bermuda out of buffalo stands.

"That's still in the lab situation right now," he said. "I think we can get it done in the next five years."

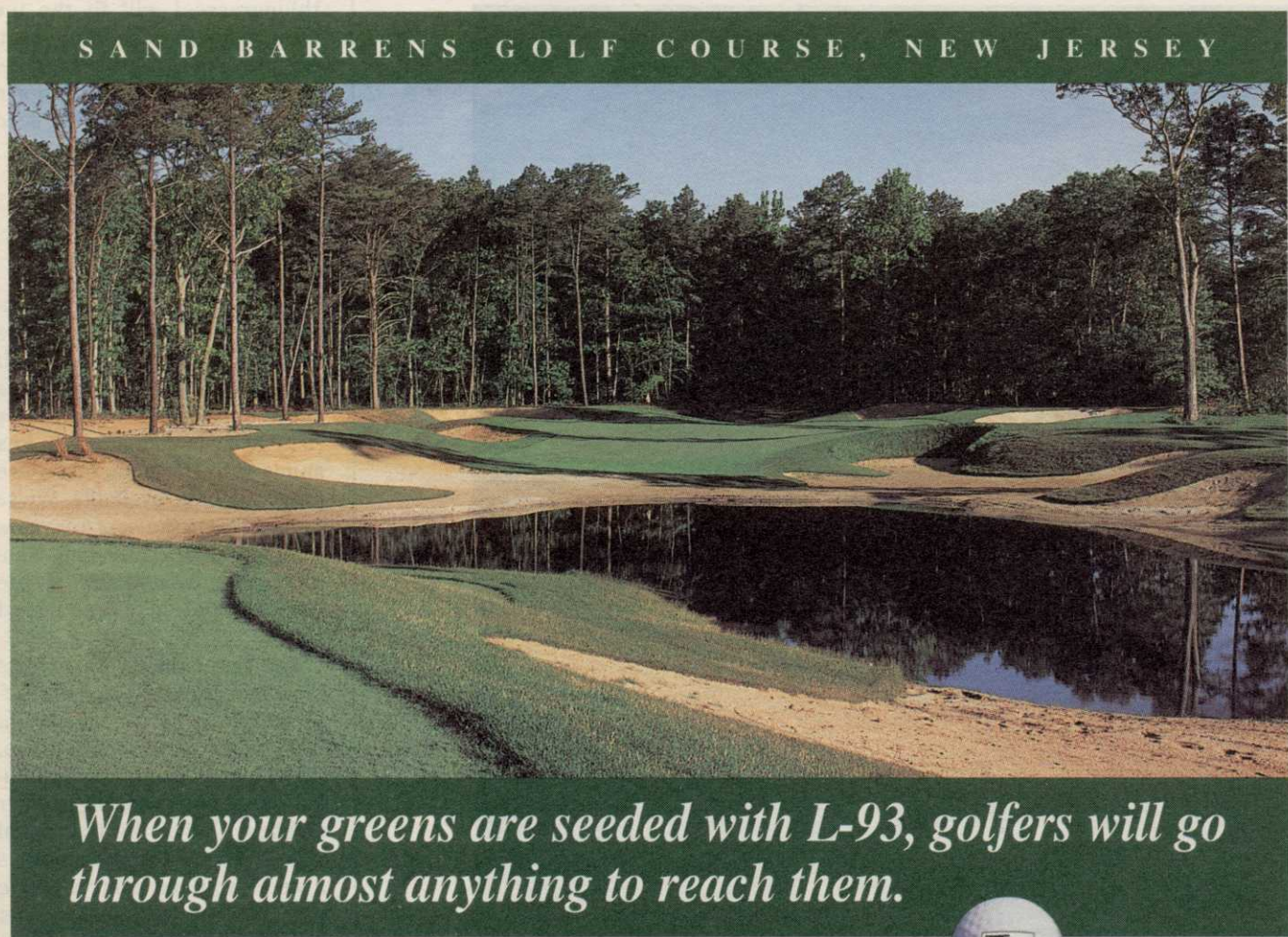
Meanwhile, the new trials on buffalograsses will not be ready until 1998, according to Kevin Morris, director of the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program. But he observed: "The seeded types have improved characteristics. There will be several good fairway types."

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More information is available from Susana Velez, registration coordinator/research conferences, Department of Botany and Plant Sciences, University of California, Riverside, Calif. 92521-0124; 909-787-4430.



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