

IGM faces lawsuit in N.J.

By ANDREW OVERBECK

EMERSON, N.J. — Meadowbrook Golf's growing contract maintenance division, International Golf Management (IGM) has hit a roadblock in New Jersey, losing five contracts in the state over the last year.

While portfolio fluctuations are a normal part of the contract maintenance business, these losses have been punctuated by two lawsuits. Emerson Golf Club's owners United Properties Group (UPG) filed suit against IGM in April seeking damages for lost revenues and reconstruction costs due to deteriorating maintenance conditions. IGM also has filed suit against Battleground Country Club in Tennent for nonpayment of amounts owing.

In the Emerson lawsuit, club officials and lawyers for both sides declined to comment for this story, but the allegations state that IGM "improperly irrigated, fertilized and otherwise improperly maintained Emerson and allowed its condition to deteriorate to such a point that the course was rendered unsuitable for use by golfers."



Scott Zakany

As a result of the poor conditions at Emerson, UPG decided to close the course in September 2001 and shift play to its sister course, Valley Brook Golf Club in Rivervale. The lawsuit said this situation caused UPG to lose revenues because they were forced to rebook outings at Valley Brook at the reduced fees charged at Emerson. As a result, the owners allege both courses suffered damaged reputations and conditions at Valley Brook suffered from heavy play. Both courses are still charging reduced rates this season to drive play back to the layouts.

According to Scott Zakany, executive vice president for IGM, the poor conditions at Emerson GC were due to poor construction.

"Last summer was a tough summer in New Jersey with heat and rainfall," he said. "We lost three greens because they were 85 to 95 percent Poa annua. The rest of the course was in great shape. These greens don't drain, they are bowls. When they don't drain they stay saturated. When you have saturated cool-season grass baking in the sun with poor drainage, you can't water it."

"They lost greens for several years prior to IGM coming on property, and they lost them again this year after IGM ended the relationship with the course," Zakany added.

P.B. Dye doing his part for affordable golf

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resort, restaurant and marina.

"I was brought in eight years ago to look at the property," said Dye. "Then I got diagnosed with cancer and took a two-year hiatus from the golf world. But we got back going on it in 1999 and I brought Jack Harris in to operate and manage the project."

Harris and Davis are major keys to the development of Buck's Point. Both have made five-year commitments to the project and bring valuable experience along with them. Harris, who has been in upper management at steel and paper mills for the past 35 years and is a master machinist, is handling the general manager and mechanic duties and Davis, who has worked with Dye since 1987, is overseeing construction and is the superintendent.

Once the course was approved in July 2000, Harris quit his job in North Carolina and moved to the area to begin construction on the course with Dye. They broke ground in November and the last seed hit the ground a year later. Despite a wet spring, which temporarily flooded the seventh and 11th holes, grow-in is almost complete. All 18 holes are scheduled to open this month.

The wide-open, 7,104-yard course sits on rolling land and offers outstanding views of the lake. The course has Pennlinks bentgrass from tee to green and a mixture of fescue, ryegrass and bluegrass in the roughs.

"I built the best golf course on the piece of land that I could and just kept going," said Dye. "It is a very playable design. But there are a couple of par-3s out there that are tougher than yacht's braid. Once this thing

gets fully-grown in there will be no hay in play. I hate hay. We want to have people find the golf ball and play it. I tried to create as big a playing surface as I could. This is just a good old farm golf course."



The sixth green at Buck's Point.

Part of the secret of the low development costs were the scaled back construction methods used to build the course. The greens are all topsoil and less than 250,000 cubic

yards of earth were moved to form the layout. Dye also brought in his own shapers and equipment from other jobs to piece the construction of the course together.

Other cost cutting measures included using used Rain Bird irrigation heads that were bought for \$5 a piece and buying mostly used equipment.

"We have one brand-new piece of equipment," said Davis. "The rest I have bought used. This winter I found a tine seeder for \$160 and a five-gang pull-behind mower to use during grow-in for \$150. Jack is such a good mechanic that anything I buy, he can fix."

Dye is out to prove that quality golf can be built for less.

"I didn't approach this project any differently, but I built it for half the price. We are trying to build a very inexpensive 18-hole golf course," he said. "The market will support low greens fees and we will come in below \$40, including golf cart and range balls. We want people to go out there, beat the ball around and have fun."

With more than 1.2 million people visiting the lake every year, Harris is confident that the course will succeed. "We are less than one hour from Cincinnati and the lake attracts people from Indianapolis and Dayton, Ohio," he said. ■

"Now they are pointing the finger and alleging the conditions cost them lost revenue."

IGM assumed maintenance duties for Emerson and Valley Brook in February 2001. Meadowbrook Golf had managed both of the clubs since 1998.

UPG's suit also claims that Meadowbrook was negligent in not imparting "its actual

and imputed knowledge of the agronomic, horticultural and maintenance condition of Emerson and Valley Brook to IGM so that the course could be properly maintained."

The lawsuit is scheduled for arbitration and the court was due to select an arbitrator by the end of August.

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N.Y. course recovers quickly from activists' vandalism

By ANDREW OVERBECK

JERICHO, N.Y. — In a communiqué issued July 31, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) took responsibility for vandalizing three greens at The Meadow Brook Club, the host of the Senior PGA Tour's Lightpath Long Island Classic, which was held the first weekend in August. The damage, however, did not disrupt the tournament.

The vandals struck sometime during the night of July 29, digging holes with shovels on the second, fourth and fifth greens. The green on the par-3, 195-yard fourth hole suffered the most damage with an 18-inch wide by one-foot deep hole dug around the cup right in the center of the green.

"We found the damage at 5:30 a.m. Tuesday morning," said superintendent John Carlone. "We had holes two and five fixed and back into play that morning but we had to close the fourth green." All 18 holes were ready to go for the tournament by Friday.

On the fourth green, Carlone's crew took sod from the back of the green and placed it over the damaged section. They then patched the back of the green with

sod from their on-site nursery.

As a result of the damage, the tournament's pro-am was shortened to a 17-hole event and the fourth hole was shortened for the competition.

"We reduced the size of the hole so they could hit shorter irons," said PGA Tour media official Dave Senko. "Instead of 195 yards it was 150 yards. Otherwise, we proceeded as normal."

Carlone planned to nurture the turf following the tournament.

"Over the long-term I will grow these patches back in raising the height of cut and doing some light liquid fertilization applications to make sure they heal as quickly as possible," he said.

According to the ALF's communiqué the group targeted The Meadow Brook Club because one of its members has ties to a firm that conducts animal research. The vandals apparently entered the 270-acre property at one of the most remote areas, three-quarters of a mile from the clubhouse and one mile away from the maintenance facility.

The Nassau County Police Department's Special Investigations Unit is handling the case.

Construction down, participation up, according to first Golf 20/20 report

By DEREK RICE

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. — Gone are the boom days of the 1990s, when new course openings were at an all-time high.

New course openings are becoming fewer and farther between as the industry tries to adjust to new participation levels, according to the

YEAR	NO. OF COURSES	OPENINGS	% INCREASE
1998	14,444	407	2.9
1999	14,887	443	3.1
2000	15,357	470	3.2
2001	15,709	352	2.3
2002*	15,994	285	1.8

*projected

Source: Golf 20/20

first annual Golf Industry Report from Golf 20/20, which takes a look at the state of various aspects of the game.

In fact, the report concludes, fewer courses are being planned and opened now than at any time in the last decade, and an increasingly smaller percentage of those being planned and opened are public-access courses.

The increase in the number of courses in recent years have gone from 3.2 percent in 2000 to 2.1 in 2001 percent. The projected increase this year is only 1.8 percent. However, given no change in rounds played from 2000 to 2001, the average number of rounds per course went from 33,737 in 2000 to 33,000 in 2001.

Last year also saw the closing of 32 courses, five of which are scheduled to reopen in the future. Of the remaining 27,

22 closed for financial reasons, while the others closed for either environmental reasons or because they were designated by a public entity for public use, such as

a highway. Where these courses have closed, the land has been used for everything from schools to housing developments. Twenty-five of these 27 courses were daily-fee and two were municipal.

However, all the news in the report was not gloomy. Among the other findings are:

- The number of participants rose from 36 million in 2000 to 37.1 million in 2001, which meets the industry's objective of adding one million participants (defined as someone five or older who has played at least one round of regulation golf or used an alternative facility or golf range in the last 12 months) per year from 2000 to 2020. On the other hand, the number of golfers (someone 18 or older who has played at least one round of regulation golf in the last 12 months) increased only slightly, from 25.4 million to 25.8 million.
- Studies in 2001 indicate an increase in the number of occasional golfers (one to

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Roundup Ready control area aims to prevent contamination

By ANDREW OVERBECK

MADRAS, Ore. —The Scotts Co., Monsanto and the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) have established an 11,000-acre control area for the production of Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass to protect against the danger of cross-pollination with conventional creeping bentgrass.

Four hundred acres of the genetically altered turfgrass will be planted this fall in Jefferson County, which is more than 110 miles away from the country's primary bentgrass production region in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

"We feel really good about the safeguards that have been put in place that will protect conventional production," said ODA spokesman Bruce Pokarney. "The whole point was to tighten down any possibility of cross pollination of conventional bentgrass, which is grown exclusively, at this time, more than 100 miles away on the other side of a major mountain range."

Dr. Kevin Turner, director of seed research and production for the Scotts Co. will oversee the control area.

"We started working with the state of

Oregon 14 months ago, making presentations on this technology and our projects," he said. "One of the things that came out was the concern over outcrossing into other species and *agrostis* varieties. However, studies show that the levels of out-

CONTROL AREA GUIDELINES

- Conventional bentgrass cannot be grown less than a quarter mile from the Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass.
- All field borders, roadside ditches and banks of waterways will be hand-weeded for 165 feet on the outside of the bentgrass fields to prevent outcrossing.
- A seed-cleaning plant will be located within the area.
- The plant will only clean Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass.
- Seed will be harvested with a dedicated combine.
- Seed will be put into sealed containers for transport from the field to the cleaning plant.
- Processed seed will not leave control area except in sealed commercial containers.
- The seed will be distributed directly to golf courses from the control area.
- Straw containing the seed will be burned.
- Any leftover stands of turf will be watered to promote growth and then killed with a herbicide and shallow tilled.
- The next crop planted in the field will have to be one that can be sprayed with a herbicide that is effective on Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass.
- Fields will be rotated every three to four years.

crossing are very, very low."

As a result of the concerns, however, Turner worked with the ODA to create the control area guidelines to insure against any contamination (see box).

"We will have dedicated seed cleaning plants and equipment, and will monitor the production fields," Turner said. "We have a multi-faceted plan to manage the

fields and prevent outcrossing."

As a further control measure, growers will have 10 percent of their pay held in an interest-bearing escrow account until May 31 following their last harvest to guarantee that the crop has been properly removed and planted in the prescribed manner.

"The stewardship program is much more demanding than any program I know of anywhere," said Ron Olson, the managing director of grower cooperative New Era Seed that has been set up to produce seed in the control area. "The performance bond is a good thing because it makes growers comply with all the stewardship requirements and quality specifications that need to be addressed."

OBJECTIONS OVER SAFETY

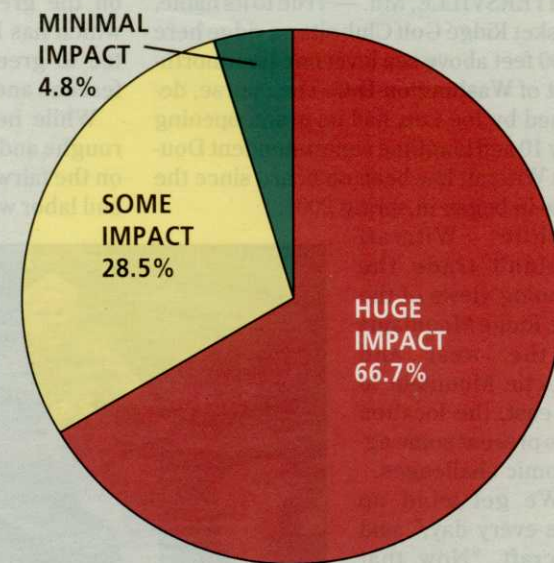
Bill Rose, president of Tee-2-Green and primary detractor of the Roundup Ready control area, is still not satisfied with the stewardship measures.

"I can easily predict disaster for open pollination," Rose said. "As a result of this control area I expect to see genetically-altered turfgrass banned in the United States. My goal is to try to not get it banned."

While he views the ODA's decision to allow the control area as a setback, Rose is still pressing forward with his own plan

GOLF COURSE NEWS POLL

WHAT IMPACT WILL GENETICALLY MODIFIED TURFGRASS HAVE ON THE EASE OF GOLF COURSE MAINTENANCE?



❖ Genetically modified turfgrasses will be just one more tool available to superintendents, especially with golf course superintendents being asked to take on more and more off-course responsibilities.

— Frank A. Rendulic, CGCS, Kittyhawk Golf Club

❖ I think we must be very careful in doing this and not jump the gun before all research and potential for a negative impact is determined.

— Larry Livingston, superintendent, Camp Creek Golf Club

❖ Disease will not be eradicated so the super's job won't change fundamentally. Turf quality on mid- to low-end courses will improve. A good super is too busy now (and if he or she is not, their crew is too large), and will have no trouble finding other things to do in their pursuit of quality within budgets.

— Tom Isaak, president, CourseCo Inc.

to develop herbicide resistant turfgrass that is male sterile. Rose said sterility could be demonstrated as early as the end of this summer. From there, commercial production of the seed could occur within three years. ■

GMO turf moving closer to reality

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being produced with Roundup Ready technology," said Dr. Kevin Turner, director of seed research and production for Scotts. "It seemed like the most appropriate first project. The next step was deciding which species should be our target. Helping golf course superintendents take care of *Poa annua* in bentgrass was the obvious project to work on."

Developing Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass, however, was relatively easy because it involved altering just one gene. Inserting drought tolerance or disease resistance will be more complicated and expensive because it will likely involve altering multiple genes.

"Biotechnology is in the Model-T phase," said Harriman. "The Roundup Ready gene can be proved very quickly, but developing disease resistance is much harder and will take longer."

Looking to the future, Harriman said developing disease, insect and drought resistant turfgrass is the ultimate goal.

"If we think about the stresses that lead to decline and how we can change that, the possibilities from a performance and aesthetic standpoint and a cost reduction

standpoint are impressive," he said.

While the goal of Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass and other genetically altered varieties are to make the superintendent's job easier, it will not replace agronomic knowledge.

"With Roundup Ready, superintendents are going to have an opportunity to focus on taking care of the grass that they predominately want," Harriman said. "They can improve the overall health of the course because they are not sacrificing bentgrass conditions for *Poa annua*. In theory they also will use less water, insecticides and fungicides."

ROUNDUP READY DEMAND

Scotts will begin planting 400 acres of Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass in Jefferson County Oregon (see story above) this fall and will be ready to harvest its first crop of seed in July 2003. Turner expects the fields to yield 200,000 pounds of seed, but Scotts will not be able to sell the product until it is approved by the United States Department of Agriculture's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service. The company expects a final decision on the application by late 2003 or early 2004.

Once approved, Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass will first be available as a fairway turfgrass variety. Data is still being collected on its ability to function on greens, but a greens-specific variety will be released in the next two to three years, said Harriman. The fairway variety can be sprayed with Roundup at 32-ounce per acre rates.

Wayne Horman, director of seed sales and marketing, estimates the initial market for Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass at 2,000 to 3,000 courses.

"Of the 11,000 cool-season courses in the country, approximately 27 percent have bentgrass fairways," he said. "Bentgrass greens represent 80 percent of the courses. While taking greens out of play to convert them is not the easiest thing to do, fairway conversions and even ryegrass fairway conversions to eliminate gray leaf spot concerns are the target markets."

While the market for Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass rather small, Scotts is treating it as an important first step on the road to other genetically altered varieties.

"Will this technology pay for itself? We are hopeful," Harriman said. "Do we know for sure? Not even close. But Scotts is confident that this will be an important first product with hopefully more to come." ■

IGM lawsuit

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In the Battleground lawsuit, IGM has filed suit against the club for payment of \$300,000 in maintenance fees that it has yet to receive.

Club officials and lawyers for both sides declined to comment, but that case is headed for mediation and could be decided as early as the end of August.

As for the other New Jersey contracts IGM lost last year, maintenance at Glenwood CC in Old Bridge was taken over by Environmental Golf, and maintenance at Bear Brook GC in Newton was brought back in house by new owners Gale and Kitson.

"No one likes to lose anything," Zakany said. "But when someone under bids you trying to get business, or someone sells a course, or someone owes you a substantial amount of money, those are difficult business decisions. But they have to be made in terms of what's best for the company."

"Emerson was the only course we lost because of maintenance conditions," he added. "I am sure it will be resolved when it comes out and we'll be fine." ■