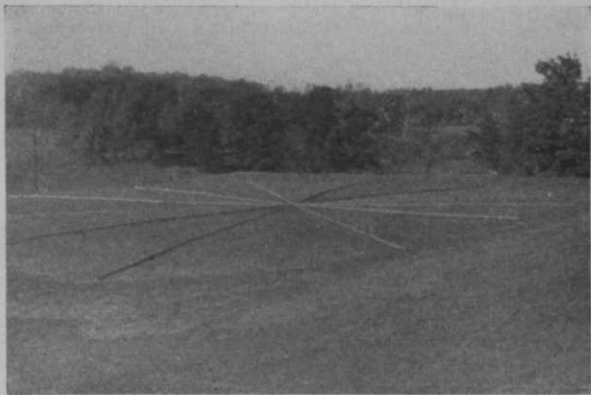


Twenty Years of BENT

By

John Monteith, Jr.



To determine the comparative worth of bent varieties under identical conditions, this 18th green at the Capital G&CC, Washington, D. C., has been divided into 12 sectors, with a different variety of bent in each. The boards will remain until the plantings have become established, thus preventing washing from one planting to another.

THIS spring marks the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the first putting green planted entirely with creeping bent. Since anniversaries always seem to be regarded as occasions for summaries and reviews this should be a good season to look over the records of creeping bent.

The shortage of bent seed caused by war provided the need for some substitute method of planting putting greens. Dr. W. S. Harban of the Columbia CC, working with Dr. C. V. Piper, Dr. R. A. Oakley and others in the United States Department of Agriculture, produced this emergency substitute in the form of stolon planting of creeping bent. By the fall of 1918 sufficient planting material had been raised at Arlington Farm to plant a new green on the public course in East Potomac Park in Washington, D. C. By the spring of 1919 it was apparent that this new method of planting putting greens had possibilities beyond the range of a makeshift substitute.

Numerous individuals interested in turf were stimulated to be on the lookout for promising strains of creeping, and also velvet bent, which might be propagated by the stolon method. Dozens of these strains, some good and many bad, were selected and planted by the army of creeping bent enthusiasts from one end of the country to the other.

Came the Battle

Then came the "fight of the century" in golf clubs. On one side were the rabid enthusiasts who recognized no faults in the new turf and on the other the old

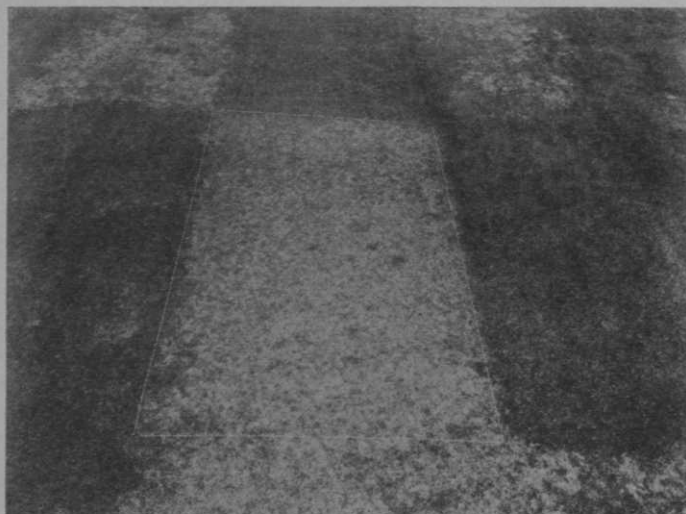
guard ready to "die but never surrender a single putt in favor of that . . . creeping bent."

When the smoke of that big battle had partly cleared away it was easy to see that creeping bent had pretty well "dug in" along all fronts. Deserters by the thousands flocked to the standards of creeping bent as they gradually recognized that its terrible dictators had no intention of destroying the golfers' hard-earned liberty to sink putts, nor even his pursuit of happiness through alibis.

Tourney Turf Trends to Bent

Curiously enough, taps has sounded for all of the leaders in that first creeping bent attack of twenty years ago. If they were alive today one can readily imagine what pleasure and satisfaction they would get in looking over the records of the major tournaments of the last ten years in this country to find that more than half of them have been played over greens that were wholly or largely creeping bent. Such a record in only twenty years, in spite of strong criticism against it and the cost of converting greens to a new type of grass, indicates the importance of creeping bent in this country.

Out of the large assortment of creeping bents that have been tested during the past two decades the three that have gained national reputation are Seaside, Washington and Metropolitan. The Seaside bent as ordinarily planted is a mixture of individual plants of creeping bent, whereas the Washington and Metropolitan strains are each individual plants propa-



In center, a good strain of creeping bent which, like Washington, is highly susceptible to dollar-spot. On either side and at rear are other strains resistant to the disease. No preventive chemicals applied on any of the plots shown.

gated by the stolon method. Although creeping bent greatly simplified the task of greenkeeping in many districts, it has not been without its handicaps. The widespread planting of this species focused more attention on the dollarspot disease to which creeping bent is generally more susceptible than are the other bents. The uniform color and texture made possible by the vegetative planting of single strains served to make golfers more critical of irregularities and imperfections in the putting surface. Greenkeepers and members of green-committees have recognized much of this criticism as unreasonable. Nevertheless the reasonable criticism that has been mixed with the unreasonable has served to stimulate the efforts for improvements that have given the American golfer the best putting greens in the world.

Better Strains Ahead? Maybe

Whether or not another twenty years will produce grasses that are superior to those we now generally use for putting greens, it will have to be admitted that whatever progress is made it will have been largely stimulated by the improvement made in creeping bent greens in this country during the past two decades.

The cost of golf of trying this and that variety of grass in this period has run into huge figures. It is likely that such wastefulness will not be repeated in the next two decades. There are, however, many thousands of grasses and special strains that should be tested. The method of testing them, it may be hoped, will be

systematic and thorough before involving the great expense of converting entire greens or entire courses to them.

The Green Section and others have selected and developed a number of strains of creeping bent that appear to be superior to the two best strains that are now commonly planted, Washington and Metropolitan. After all it is not much to brag about to develop a strain of bent which under certain limited conditions will prove superior to the Washington or Metropolitan strains. It will, however, be something to brag about when a strain is finally developed that under severe tests will stand up better than those strains.

Few Strains Stand Out

Not infrequently one hears an outburst against Washington bent, for instance, as some enthusiastic individual extols the virtues of some special strain he has recently been planting. Critics of champions are always more numerous than champions. In sports, true champions gain pre-eminence not on the basis of occasional brilliance but on steady performance. So it is with the champions of grass. A few bad rounds are unfortunate it must be admitted but after all they don't rule Washington bent out of championship rating. Neither do a few good rounds by a "dark horse" strain establish it as a champion. They should simply make it eligible to compete where the going is toughest.

The present champion of the creeping bents planted by the stolon method is Washington bent. It has lost many a

match and has had the handicap of others masquerading under its name. But its scores are in the books—and it is still scoring.

The strangest thing about this champion is that it is one of the oldest in the field. It will be twenty years old next September. A few months after golfers first played on a green of vegetatively-planted creeping bent the Washington bent was started on its way by Dr. Piper. It is truly remarkable that with all the practical men as well as the technical men like Dr. Piper who have looked for strains on thousands of putting greens in this country during the past twenty years none has so far selected a strain to replace this early selection.

Has Defects Also

After paying our respects to the champion, we can admit its weaknesses. For one thing it is entirely too susceptible to dollarspot. It also is too sensitive to cold weather and may be decidedly off color even well into the spring and in early fall. In extremely hot weather it may be easily injured and is rather slow to recover. Any newcomer which can play all the shots Washington plays as well, and in addition can beat it regularly on any of the above three weaknesses, will be hailed as a new champion.

Greenkeepers, members of the Green Section staff, and others have been selecting promising material for a number of years. A large number of these strains have been assembled at the Arlington Turf Garden for the qualifying rounds in the last two years. Several of them have beaten Washington and Metropolitan.

The leaders are now all set for the next test which will be conducted on golf courses in many districts under distinctly different soil and climatic conditions. Planting material has been raised at Arlington and arrangements are now being made for spring plantings on greens where they will be subjected to play. The plan is to plant several grasses on the same green so that the performance of each may be observed and rated in relation to the others growing under identical conditions.

Greenkeepers and club members will be asked to rate these grasses using the same numerical scoring system. In addition to the strains planted with the stolon method there will be seeded areas for comparison. When the scores come in at the end of the season we will know whether we

are likely soon to have a new national champion of bents. After all, the national champion in this greenkeeping field will no doubt be of far more direct interest than other champions of golf to the great body of average golfers who make most of the putts and pay most of the bills.

IT'S ON THE HOUSE

By TOM REAM
Mgr., Westmoreland C.C.

What is of more value to a club than that intangible asset—goodwill?

The only men who really know the club business are those who never stop trying to learn it.

The vacuum cleaner is the most effective weapon for prevention of vermin.

Preach and practice the gospel of good-fellowship.

Put some hot stuff through your peeler drain occasionally. The accumulation is starch principally, and hot and cold water only congeal it.

The brand must live up to its reputation.

A certain amount of interference can be absorbed—beyond that, the whole place suffers and your statement shows poorly. On the other hand, if you have free sway, make sure you justify your responsibility.

Go to any part of your club and visualize a fire there. Would you be able to reach the alarm and extinguisher apparatus easily? The suggestion is to do this before the fire—you'll find out soon enough after it.

The club employee who knows his business never has to explain that fact.

To succeed in the business of club hospitality, one must be service-minded.