

Texas Bent Trials May Aid Small Town Greens

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"The best way to get rid of 'em is to shoot 'em."

I visited the Texas Turf Conference January 13-14-15 held at Texas A. & M. at College Station, because I was going to visit Col. Clifford C. Whitney, the Daddy of G.I. golf in Texas during the war years, and because I am just as much interested in the grasses for greens grown down that way as I am interested in our own types of grasses.

It was after the middle of the day when I arrived there, and the "Old Colonel," being even more than a golf fiend than he was two years ago when I left him, was already out at the Conference to absorb every bit of information that he could on the growing of turf.

Although he was more or less looking for a visit from me, he didn't know that I was any where near that part of the country. When I opened the door of the conference room, I immediately spotted him sitting in the back row with but one empty chair beside him. I walked in, but he was so wrapped up in the lecture on the extermination of rodents that I was able to step past him and into the empty seat without getting his attention.

After about ten minutes of the poisoning of gophers, moles, ants, and the like, I shoved him a bit on the shoulder, but he only scooted over. A few minutes passed before the subject of the ridding of the armadillo came up, and I nudged him again, but still he wouldn't give his undivided attention to anyone but the speaker.

"We have been able to kill the armadillo with poison," said the lecturer. I knew what was running through the Colonel's mind. He was dreaming back on the nights during his operation of an army club at Camp Bowie, Tex., with myself as his army pro and general man. We would catch a good dark night to run over the golf course in a jeep and knock the armored pests over with a carbine.

Carbine As Pest Cure

This time, I pushed him on the shoulder a bit harder and whispered in his ear, "The

best thing to do with 'em is shoot 'em." For the first time, he noticed that I was sitting beside him, and we had to hold ourselves in to keep from breaking up the meeting. A few seconds later, the lecturer made the remark that after all the most successful means was to shoot the armadillo.

In its second year of existence, the Texas Turf Assn. is well organized and on the road to being a big asset to turf growers of the state, not only for golf courses, but for such other purposes as lawns, airfields, and even pastures.

The agriculture department of Texas A. & M., where the Conference has been held its first two years, is working in cooperation with the Association which has raised enough money to carry on experiments. Tests will be made during the coming year by college personnel and exhibits of turf and soils will be on display for the meeting next year.

At a banquet and business meeting held in conjunction with the conference, Pres. Gibb Gilchrist, of the college, said that it was an open secret that the school would start before long on the project of constructing an 18-hole golf course along with the remodeling of a horse barn now on the site for a club house. The facilities would be for the use of the students and townspeople from the nearby communities of College Station and Bryan.

Many very good points on the building of greens and the care of turf were brought up by well known turf men, including Dr. Fred Grau, director of the Green section of the USGA. And, no doubt, many of these ideas will be carried back to respective golf courses by visiting greenkeepers and pros to bring about even better putting surfaces.

Texas Going to Bent Greens

Being from a bent grass green section, it was quite interesting to me to sit in on the discussion of bent grass for greens in Texas. Although its not a new thing for them, and they already know that it can be grown down that way, a big majority still have the Bermuda grass for the sum-

mer season and change over to Italian winter rye for the winter months. The Colonial CC at Fort Worth where the National Open was held in 1941 was the first club down there to have bent for greens. Colonial not only proved that the grass could be grown, but the club's greens were very good. Since that time several other clubs have changed over, a few being Brook Hollow in Dallas, Dallas Athletic CC, a good many in West Texas, and I understand that the Lakewood CC in Dallas is at this time making the change over to bent.

Graham Ross, pro at the Dallas Athletic CC, was a speaker at the conference on how his club changed from Bermuda grass to bent. "After our greens had been so lousy for some time, the club handed me a nominal sum of money and told me to do something about them. One of my first thoughts was to put in bent, but that seemed so risky, especially with the sum allotted for their betterment. My next thought was that the Bermuda had been so bad that I couldn't any more than get kicked out of a job by trying bent, and I was looking for a job when I got this one. So I immediately started some snooping around and within a matter of weeks the new bent greens were under construction. At present they are by far better greens than we ever had with Bermuda grass."

Ross was asked to compare the cost of upkeep of the two types of grasses. He answered that he couldn't give them figures as to the actual difference in cost, but in his own case it wasn't great because he didn't have much financial leeway. Play due to better greens had not only picked up but was much more enjoyable for the golfer. But most likely the best answer to this question was given by one of the other speakers on turf when he made the remark that the average Bermuda green could be grown easy enough, but to have a Bermuda green at its best, almost as much work, knowledge, and care had to be given to the grass as that given to bent.

Plea for Smaller Clubs

One member suggested that possibly the Turf Association was putting too much emphasis on the larger club instead of considering the smaller club in the construction and caring for greens. Most of us know the cost of tearing up and reconstructing a green with the proper base in order to grow healthy grass. And we also know that many of the smaller clubs go on from year to year with bad putting surfaces because they just don't see how they can dig up enough money to dig up their greens and revamp them to the accepted methods.

Many of these smaller clubs built their greens years ago by mounding up a pile of dirt from close area and planting grass.

It was either this way or else stay with the old sand or cotton-hull green, because of the lack of funds to do better. Those same clubs still lack those funds to do much about making a change.

And as we have since learned there are no short cuts in the reconstruction or the building of a good healthy green. That was even brought out in the conference.

Yet I am still wondering if we can't do something to provide information to these clubs with small funds in every section of the country to show them they can have better greens than they have now without spending a heap of money.

I am wondering this, because just after the meeting I visited back in Brownwood, Tex., where the U. S. government took over the golf club because it was amid the maneuvering area. I had been detailed out there to take charge. We had the greens then in gretty good shape, but they were Bermuda. I knew just about every blade of grass then and had a lot of those blades named, not from playing golf on them—I didn't have time to play golf—but from trying to take particular attention to each green and tee in their care.

I knew what was under those greens—a heap of Texas soil dragged from the areas around and contoured to make a putting surface without even the help of any under drainage or a hypodermic needle.

Bent Good at Brownwood

When I played these same greens recently they were in bent grass, and I would say that they were pretty close to being as smooth and as fine a putting surface as any green on which I have ever pampered a ball into a hole. The bent that had been sown over the top of Bermuda grass without redoing the base or even molesting the old type grass was lying dormant at this season of the year, but they putted true, and it was very easy to see how very well they must have putted before the grass went to rest for their winter season.

I know that the greenkeeper there had very little knowledge of bent grass. I am sure that the man in charge of the greens, E. J. Weatherby, learned only about the characteristics of bent grass from articles that he had read along with the many very good suggestions published in *GOLFDOM*. Yet he had good greens that cost only the price of the seed with the addition of the labor that it took to topdress and scatter the seed.

How long these greens will remain to be extra good remains to be seen. But the old base without even underground drainage has mothered a very healthy putting surface in its first year, and a small club has good greens right now along with a healthy financial statement.