

Report on Southern Grasses

By CHAN W. BAKER

Greenkeeping in the South used to be a combination job, part greenkeeping, part fishing. Lately, however, most greenkeepers are 'way behind on their fishing. Today, greenkeeping is rapidly becoming a profession requiring year-round maintenance, and a year-round knowledge of grasses and golfers, and how to handle both. Players are demanding more greens and less alibis. The greenkeeper is accepting this task and obligation admirably. If he does not, he is simply out of a job.

The development and maintenance of better golf courses is not the only challenge in the south. All agriculture is doing wonderful things and doing them fast. Improved turf for home lawns, cemeteries and public playgrounds is a must where milder climates permit year-round activity. The Southern Seedsmen's Assn. recently made a substantial donation to the USGA Green Section for it realizes that research for better grasses benefits them as well. Turf improvement is progressing rapidly in the south and the greenkeeper is right out in front. Without the greenkeeper's help, however, I would not be able to make this report on grasses south of the Mason-Dixon line.

Bermuda grass is as southern as sunshine and is the object of the most study for putting greens and for turf generally. U-3 is proving the most cold resistant of the Bermudas and at the same time has many desirable advantages for use with cool-season grasses to provide year-round turf. It may be that further investigation will provide a strain which will retain its usefulness 12 months of the year. T-57 is giving a good account of itself in the southern half of the Gulf states and north Florida. The Hall strain is also in favor with many in this latitude. T-3, a Tifton selection, was mixed with T-57 for the new football field at Gainesville, Fla. For general all-around wear and tear, the T-57 seems to be the grass of the hour on turf which will receive the proper Bermuda maintenance.

In Florida the Bayshore (Gene-Tift-call it what you may) and the Everglades 3 developed at Belle Glade have both withstood extreme cold, with less damage than to other Bermudas. An increasing number of Florida putting greens are being planted with Bayshore, for they remain green throughout winter when intelligently maintained. Both this grass and Everglades 3 grow quite rapidly and there is some fear that they may grow too fast and outdo themselves. If this turns out to be the case it will simply be a matter of proper main-

tenance, just as it is with some of our more aggressive creeping bents. It is, however, a new innovation for some of the boys down here.

Seasonal Grass Change Questioned

It looks very much as if the tedious task of converting to winter grass and reconverting to Bermuda in the spring may soon be a thing of the past, especially in the deep south. It is going to be a matter of greenkeeping 12 months of the year whether the course is open or not. These new selections just do not lend themselves to abandonment during the summer. They have to be kept in playing condition right through the year in order to have the texture and turf quality desired.

Just as Bermuda is being tried out in northern latitudes beyond its accepted limits, the cool-season grasses are receiving extensive and exacting try-outs further and further south. Bent grass greens are possible in Miami at a price. Colonial bent sowed as a winter grass, over bermuda greens at Coral Gables, remained in the bermuda turf for well over three years. It never received any fungus control treatment or special assistance from the greenkeeper. Today the geographic and climatic limits are not as important as maintenance procedure and it is therefore difficult to evaluate any one grass in a given area without thorough trial under competent management.

Pensacola Bahia has been found wintering in North Carolina. Paraguan Bahia, abandoned on experimental plots on southern airports, has taken over almost completely in every instance. Both were developed as pasture grasses but show considerable promise as permanent, economical turf grasses for roughs, airports, playgrounds and roadsides. Both are available from seed.

Centipede grass is one of our best low fertility grasses. It cannot stand the prosperity of regular feeding and if overfed invariably mats and runs itself out. Work at the University of Miami seems to indicate that perhaps a management program which will include removal of this existing runner growth may prove to be the answer in keeping this turf in good condition.

Centipede is very resistant to disease and wears well but is of little value in shade. It is not particular about the quantity or quality of the soil on which it is planted. Centipede seed can be produced in commercial quantities, but at present there is no seed available. Until the grower can be assured of a reasonable price for his seed,

he will not venture into this field of production, for unlike many other grasses from which seed is harvested, the off-season pasture value of Centipede is practically negligible.

Zoysias Show Promise

More and more interest is being centered in the Zoysias. No seed of *Zoysia matrella* is available. It seeds prolifically in south Florida, Puerto Rico and many of the islands of the West Indies. At the same time it winters in Connecticut, and two of the finest lawns in Springfield, Mass. are in *Zoysia matrella*. Some seed of the *Zoysia japonica* is available in commercial quantities this year. In tests conducted at the University of Miami, Coral Gables, Fla., the commercial imported seed was planted adjacent to domestic seed supplied by the Bureau of Plant Industry and it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. Whether the japonicas will prove climate-hardy for south Florida remains to be seen, for generally they are considered more cold-resistant than the matrellas. The japonica turf is somewhat coarser than matrella but still finer than Centipede. One strain of matrella grown in south Florida can be maintained at $\frac{1}{2}$ inch height of cut without damage. Commercial production of *Zoysia matrella* seed is already under way in south Florida, and as soon as some of the selections of *Zoysia japonica* are released by the Bureau of Plant Industry they will also be sent out for commercial seed production. So far this year the imported seed has been especially high quality and all lots released to date have been free from ergot and other seed-borne pests.

Until further research on harvesting methods or scarifying the seed have been conducted, a simple method of soaking the seed in wet sand for two or three weeks has overcome the slow germination bugaboo which handicapped the Zoysias in the past. They can now be germinated so as to have a good catch in 30 days. Unlike *Zoysia matrella*, the japonica makes a somewhat more loosely knit sod and it is expected that some of the cool-season grasses will permanently cohabit with it to provide the necessary year-round green turf so important to the South.

The Zoysias are extremely low in their fertility requirements and root deeply into the soil. They are our best southern shade grasses and have proven themselves to be 100% immune to chinchbug, Japanese beetle and most other pests which attack southern lawns.

We have not even cracked the surface on turf research in the south. However the flag is down, and we are off to a flying start in all departments. With men like Glenn Burton, Eddie Robinson, Jim Watson, Howard Sprague and V. T. Stoutemyer, we cannot miss. We have the challenge—watch us go!

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