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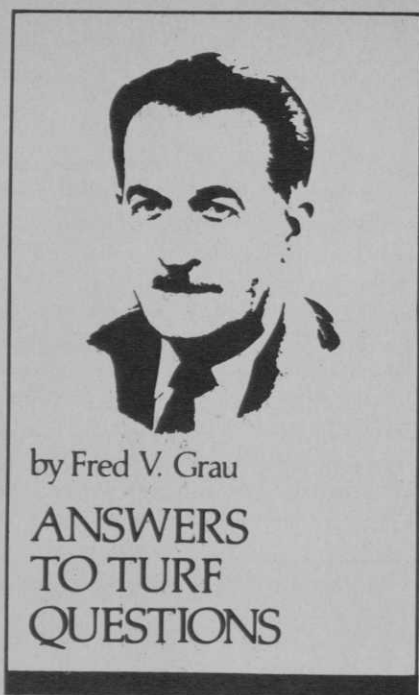


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by Fred V. Grau
ANSWERS TO TURF QUESTIONS

Fighting the artificial turf invasion

Real turf is facing a challenge from the installation of synthetic carpets that try to imitate the real thing. In some respects it is an improvement over the poorer examples of real turf; in other respects the qualities of the best real turf can never be equaled by any artificial covering.

Many failures in providing acceptable real turf stem from the fact that the caretaker of the installation was never trained to understand the needs of real grass. Supervisory personnel often failed to provide adequate quantities of the essential materials. Once in the past I recommended the best fertilizer program I knew for the main playing field at a major university. The director of athletics vetoed the program and bought the cheapest fertilizer he could find and severely burned the grass so that it could not recover in time for the season's schedule. This kind of interference has hastened the installation of artificial turf. In this case, the needs of the turf were ignored in the interests of saving a few dollars. The turf that season went to pieces and was the cause of much player dissatisfaction. For the most part, the field was mud instead of clean grass.

Clean uniforms seem to be a plus for artificial turf, especially on color television. True it costs less in clean-

ing bills, but with all factors under control, real turf need be no dirtier than fake turf. There will be grass stains, of course, but there will be no infected brush burns that come from the imitation turf. Excellent real turf can be grown on sandy soil which does not churn into a giant mud pie when wet because excess water quickly drains through the soil. Our failing has come from our inability to sell the coaches and the administration on providing the money to build the field properly the first time. But, when the fake stuff is installed, the money somehow miraculously appears. Some artificial installations have materialized because agronomists and coaches failed to agree or even talk the same language.

High temperature distress is a big cause of unhappiness with the fake grass. No one has ever complained of this on real turf which has a built in cooling system, evapotranspiration. Real turf contributes much to the environment; synthetic turf contributes nothing.

In this brief discussion I stressed athletic fields, but golf courses and other turfgrass areas are not immune to the persuasion of the profit-seeking firms that produce, sell and install artificial turf. These firms are eyeing golf course tees and greens. Here, with existing high-quality real turf managed by professional superintendents, the challenge has so far been met. Hopefully invasion of synthetic turf will continue to be a minor consideration.

No such bulletin

Q—We are puzzled and bewildered as to what to do concerning all these new grass varieties that are being put on the market. Right now we refer to the bluegrasses, but the bents and the fescues are crowding us too. Is there any place where we can get a bulletin that will give us unbiased statements concerning the performance of each variety so that we can choose more intelligently?

(Quebec, Canada)

A—We who follow research and variety testing closely across the country also have to work hard to keep from being befuddled. We feel that some varieties that are offered for sale have not been tested adequately. So far as I know the bulletin that you seek does not exist. Were you to ask for information from Purdue, Ohio,

(Continued on page 28)



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