

It's a European Thing

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shallow rooting grass will die three times faster than a grass that can reach down with its roots and pull more moisture," he says.

Schmitz and his crew overseed the greens monthly with Browntop bentgrass. They verticut the greens in two directions prior to overseeding. They topdress the greens after overseeding, and brush it in.

Schmitz notes the greens can't be groomed heavily for at least two weeks after overseeding.

Yes, the greens don't look healthy at times. The bentgrass is able to retain its blue-green color, but the yellow *Poa* looks like it's ailing. "Your membership must be aware that the greens will look a bit sick at times," Schmitz says.

Schmitz has been preaching "consistent playability of greens" to members as the way of making them roll quicker. "If we have decent fine grass and not a bunch of spongy *Poa annua* biotypes, then the greens will putt better," he says.

Some U.S. superintendents have tried facets of Schmitz's *Poa* control program, says Zontek, who adds he recently spoke to a Virginia superintendent who placed his course's greens on a modified acid theory. The course had new greens, and the superintendent planned to fertilize them with ammonium sulfate to drop the pH level and suppress disease.

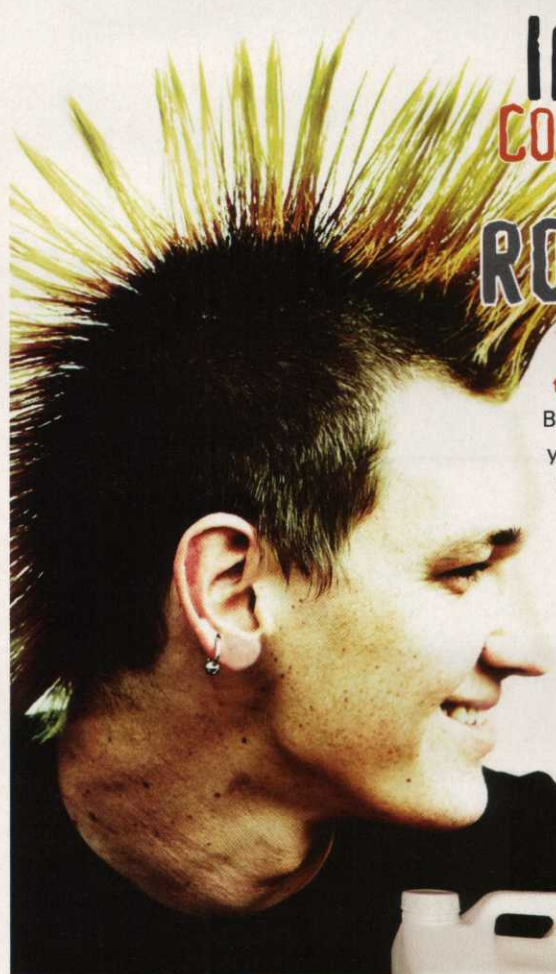
ON THE VERGE OF

It's been a long time coming, but its arrival date may be on the horizon. If all goes well on the regulatory end, Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass, a joint project between The Scotts Co. and Monsanto Co. that has been in development for several years, might be available for sale next year, Mark Schwartz, senior vice president of seed operations for Scotts, recently told *Golfdom*.

Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass is a genetically modified turf. Scotts and Monsanto inserted a gene to modify the plant's DNA to make it resistant to Monsanto's nonselective herbicide Roundup to make it easier for superintendents to control turf weeds, especially *Poa annua*.

In January, Schwartz said he hoped the government would deregulate the product in the next six to nine months. He said the U.S. Department of Agriculture indicated it would publish an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the product between now and mid-June. "Effectively, the EIS will point out any environmental risks or lack thereof, and should have a recommended course of action," Schwartz said, noting the Environmental Protection Agency must also sign off on the product before it can be sold.

Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass has sparked controversy the past few years. Bill Rose, chairman of Turf-Seed,



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"But it's a resort golf course and costs more than \$100 to play," Zontek says. "So [the golfers] like the greens mowed at one-eighth of an inch."

The sticking point is the height of cut. Zontek says U.S. golfers demand fast greens made by a short cut, not just consistent ball roll. He adds that Schmitz's *Poa*-control method allows greens with consistent playability, but they are dense.

Zontek says many European golf course managers and greenkeepers adhere to the process because they believe it's part of traditional greenkeeping — not the modern-greenkeeping methods

that permeate through golf course maintenance in America.

"You mow high, you don't water and you don't fertilize — it's a links-management type philosophy," Zontek says. "It's like Fords and Chevys — people are passionate about one or the other. You've got the traditional greenkeepers, and you've got the modern greenkeepers."

Another reason the program might not work in America has to do with the bentgrass. Although both colonial and creeping bentgrasses can withstand less fertility than *Poa annua*, colonial bent remains more vital against less fertility than creeping bent. And as Bob Brame, director of the USGA Green Section's North-Cen-

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Deregulation?

has voiced his concerns about the glyphosate-resistant turf cross-breeding with non-glyphosate-resistant turf.

In 2004, *The New York Times* reported that a "new study shows that genes from genetically engineered grass can spread much farther than previously known, a finding that raised questions about the straying of other plants altered through biotechnology."

In 2002, Scotts and Monsanto temporarily withdrew their application for the approval of Roundup Ready bentgrass for commercial use in order to answer more questions the American Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) had about the turf variety. At the time Scotts said such a delay was common in the regulatory process.

Schwartz said "it's understandable" that it has taken so long to bring Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass to market. Because it's the first perennial turfgrass up for deregulation, it has received more scrutiny, he said.

"This is an important precedent, not just for Scotts, but for any company that may think about having a genetically enhanced turfgrass crop or other perennial such as shrubs or trees," Schwartz added.

— Larry Aylward



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