

# Month



## Remembering Jack Kidwell

Jack Kidwell, who died last spring at 82, was one of the golf course industry's few triple talents. The Ohio-based Kidwell was an architect, superintendent and owner.

Kidwell, whose career spanned 50 years, is not well-known nationally, but he's a popular name among golf fans in the Columbus area, where he designed many popular courses, including Hickory Hills GC in Grove City, Ohio. Kidwell, who designed more than 50 courses in his 50-year-career, was also a proponent of affordable golf.

Hickory Hills, which opened in 1979, was designed from 181 acres of woods and meadows. It features streams, five lakes and rolling hills. The 13th hole is a testament to Kidwell's fine work.

Raymond Anthony, superintendent of Hickory Hills, says Kidwell will be remembered as a top architect – and the consummate gentleman. "He never had a harsh word to say about anybody, and he always spoke highly of others," Anthony says. "That's what I think of when I think of Jack Kidwell."

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Circle No 111

# Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

**I**sometimes think the golf industry exists in two distinct, parallel universes. I call them Game World and Maintenance World.

In Game World, you find highly paid golf superstars enjoying an existence unencumbered by strife. They live in a well-modulated world of courtesy cars, sponsored parties and other trappings common to the world of the professional athlete. Their lives are well-ordered.

In Maintenance World, on the other hand, superintendents deal with unpredictable forces like the weather, golfers who don't know the rules of etiquette, turf diseases and interfering club officers. Their world is the antithesis of order, with wildness ruling the day.

Inhabitants of Game World almost never cross paths with those from Maintenance World. In fact, if someone from Maintenance World transported into Game World and brought along with him the contentious issues facing the superintendent profession, then Game World might implode and disappear from the galaxy.

Isn't it strange how nothing negative ever spoils the superstar admiration golfers receive? It's as if some mystical force relegates all the dark and foreboding thoughts about golf and the environment to Maintenance World.

The celebrities and television networks make money hand over fist on the playing fields of golf, but those who tend those verdant venues bear the brunt of sensational headlines about water guzzling golf courses or fish kills in ponds.

The cash registers of clubs jingle with the sale of greens fees, tournament admissions and ever-changing golf equipment. Those revenues combine with product endorsements and sponsorships to guarantee big purses. On the other hand, the keepers of the greens must beg and squeeze suppliers for a few dollars to finance tournaments to raise a few bucks for turf research. Where's the justice in that?

Wouldn't it be nice if the lords and ladies of the game would throw down a few gold pieces to the laborers who bolster their rich kingdoms? Only a handful of golf pros give their time and (some) dollars to turf research, preaching our value to the choir instead of the general public.

## Parallel Universes Divide Industry

BY JOEL JACKSON



ISN'T IT STRANGE  
HOW NOTHING  
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The USGA funded turf research to the tune of several millions of dollars over the past few years, but it could do a better job of advertising the positive results during the U.S. Open. Furthermore, what roles do the PGA, LPGA and Senior PGA Tours and the PGA of America play in this story?

For all the charitable giving that those tours tout, they should include turf programs at the leading universities for a share of the loot that is plundered from Game World. If they *are* donating to turf research, it's a well-kept secret that instead ought to be heralded on prime-time TV.

Think about how decisively public opinion could be swayed if golf's superstars announced, "Hey, we spend most of our lives on a golf course and we wouldn't be out here if it wasn't safe." As an alternative, the PGA could formally announce an annual donation for turf research at the PGA or TPC Championships.

Along with presenting the cardboard check to the researchers, PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem could say, "All the scientific data to date shows that golf courses are not harmful to the environment. To prove it, we are giving \$X million to keep testing our maintenance practices and products to make sure it stays that way."

We often say that golf course maintenance isn't rocket science, but sometimes I wonder if we haven't blasted into a different solar system, far removed from the game the public sees on TV.

If Maintenance World dies off from lack of water and strangulation from government red tape, then it might implode. Where would Golf World be then?

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*Joel Jackson, CGCS, retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.*

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# Blazing a New Trail

The brash new bermudas are headed north, challenging bentgrass varieties as a choice for greens in new areas of the country

BY SHANE SHARP

In years past, the line that determined whether you chose bentgrass or bermudagrass for your greens in the United States was as clear as the Mason-Dixon. In the Southeast, if you were opening a golf course around or south of Myrtle Beach, S.C., bermuda was the obvious choice. The Southwest could be broken into definite zones: bentgrass for the cool winter nights of Palm Springs, Calif., and Scottsdale, Ariz.; and bermudagrass for the torrid summer days of Austin, Texas, and Phoenix.

These days, however, the line isn't so clear. New revolutionary breeds of bermudagrass, combined with myriad playing and economic considerations, are destroying the old rules of thumb as fast new golf courses are being built.

"There are more superintendents in the Dallas-Fort Worth area that have gone to

ultradwarf bermudagrass," says Tom Kastler, superintendent at the Runaway Bay Golf and CC in Bridgeport, Texas. "It really looks like the trend around here. There are still some fine clubs that grow bent, but they are extremely private."

Ultradwarf bermudagrass varieties are responsible for blurring the line where bermuda-

grass greens are customary. In particular, the arrival of TiffEagle bermudagrass in the Southeast has agronomists scrambling to redraw the traditional boundaries. It can be cut down to bentgrass heights, rolls true and is tougher than a Johnny Cochran cross-examination.

"I have a slide that shows the southern boundary of bentgrass in South Carolina and Georgia," says Patrick O'Brien, director of the USGA's Southeastern Green Section. "The traditional line on the coast is Myrtle Beach, but we have one course in Hilton Head that has bentgrass greens. So where is the line now? It is disappearing. My prediction is that where we had a line in the Southeast will become murky because of new ultradwarf bermudagrass varieties."

In fact, if you are a bentgrass green in the Palmetto State, you had better find time to pray for your life. In the past 1.5 years, two courses in Myrtle Beach re-

placed their bentgrass greens with Tifeagle. In Columbia, S.C., all but two golf courses have reverted to bermudagrass. In Hilton Head — the state's premier golfing destination — bentgrass greens are limited to a few private facilities.

"If you are a resort course in Myrtle Beach, bermuda is the way to go," says Tim Guthrie, superintendent at the Tradition GC in Paw-

**New revolutionary  
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grass are destroying  
the old rules of  
thumb about where  
it will grow.**

leys Island, S.C. "Bermudagrass does not need to be aerified in the peak fall and spring seasons like bentgrass."

For years, the Tradition was one of the few upscale courses in the southern end of the Grand Strand to use bermudagrass on its greens. But recently, True Blue GC on Pawleys Island, S.C., and Wachesa Plantation East in Murrells Inlet, S.C., underwent major renovations that included replacing their bentgrass greens with Tifeagle.

"If every other bermudagrass was to get a virus and die, Tifeagle would be the only stand that would live," Guthrie says. "Tifeagle is the grass of the future, but even Tifdwarf can be taken to a different level if you take good care of it."

According to True Blue professional Danny Gore, the new Tifeagle greens at his award-winning Mike Strantz-designed course have been a hit with players.

"All we've had are good comments on the new greens," Gore says. "Players who have played here before are saying that they like the new greens better than the old ones. Tifeagle can roll as true as bent, but it can stand up to anything."

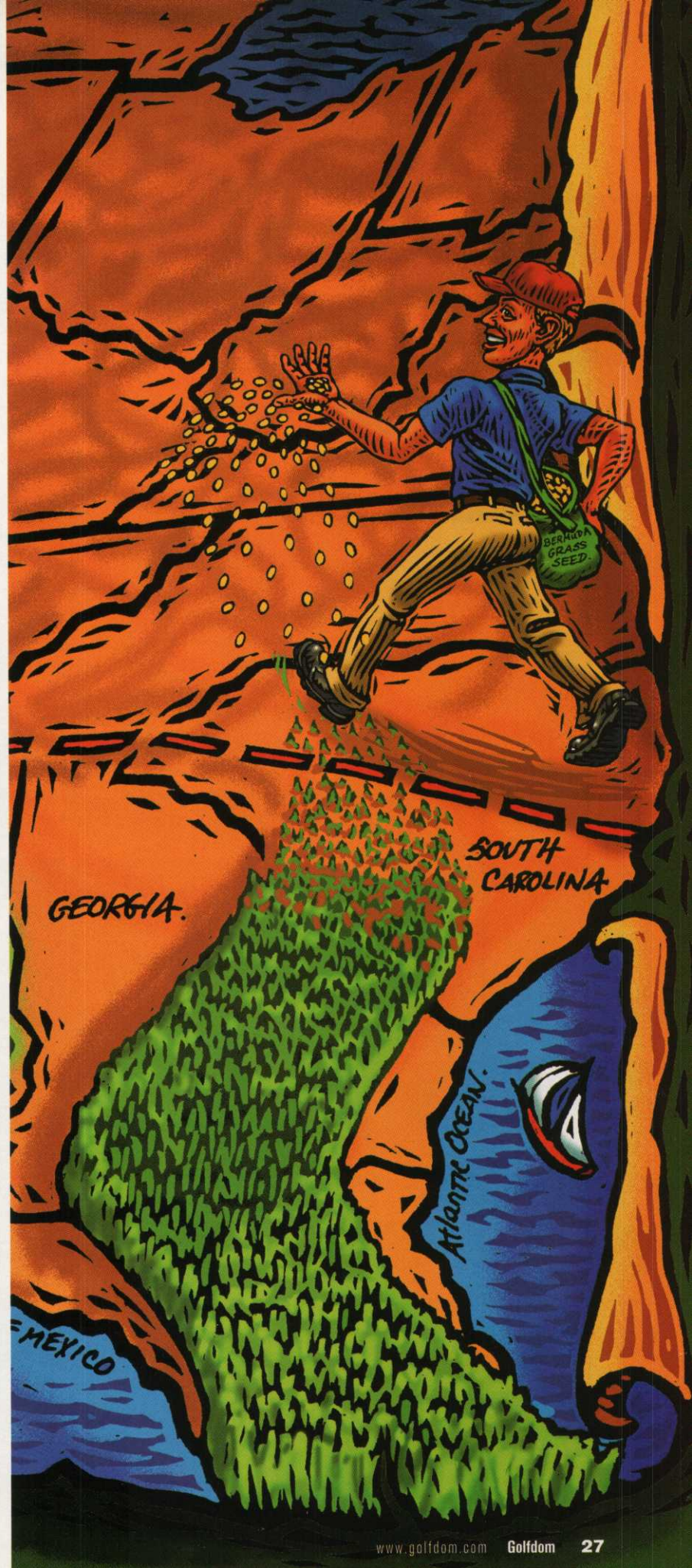
That's not to say there aren't reasons to stick with bentgrass. Tougher strands of bentgrass are being developed. Skip Lynch, director of golf and sports turf at the Seed Research of Oregon, in Corvallis, Ore., says the advances in both grass types are part of an unusual phenomenon.

"While bermudas are going further north, ryes, blues and bents are going further south," says Lynch, whose company produces SR1119 and SR1120 bentgrasses for courses in the Southeast and Southwest. "But the real determining factor for anyone who is looking at the options is, 'How much money am I going to spend to maintain it, and can I get a marketing advantage from it?'"

Among south Strand courses in the Myrtle Beach corridor, only the Tom Jackson-designed River Club hasn't switched from bent to bermuda. The course recently replaced its old bermudagrass greens with A-1 bentgrass. Jim Neely, River Club's certified superintendent, says that defying the trend is something his course doesn't mind doing to please its patrons.

"Having three courses and a resort hotel

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**“My prediction is that where we had a line in the Southeast will become murky because of the new ultradwarf bermudagrasses.”**

PATRICK O'BRIEN, USGA

**The number of annual rounds on a course determines the grass selection for the greens.**

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across the street, we get high demand for bentgrass, whether players know what they're playing on or not,” Neely says.

According to Neely, the number of annual rounds on a course determines the grass selection for greens. As part of a multi-course facility, Neely and professional Nate DeWitt spread play among the other courses at Litchfield Plantation.

“We're fortunate to have three golf courses,” Neely says. “In the summer, when the greens are under stress, we can push some play to our other courses. We have also spaced our tee times so the number of rounds [on each course] will be reduced.”

But Neely adds that any course south of Myrtle Beach hosting more than 35,000 rounds per year is taking a chance by selecting bentgrass greens over bermudagrass. O'Brien is even more specific on the future of greens in the Grand Strand.

“In Myrtle Beach, you will see a change back from bentgrass to bermudagrass,” he says. “The question is how far north can you take bermuda because it is a tropical grass. You are seeing the

first moves in the south end of Myrtle Beach, and the USGA is 100 percent behind it.”

In Georgia, the bent/bermuda line is being blurred around the Macon area. According to Bill Womac, Dunwoody CC's certified superintendent, the ultradwarf revolution hasn't arrived in Atlanta, however.

“Someone said we will have the ultradwarf grass here someday, but I just don't see it because [it lacks] cold hardiness,” Womac says. “Any club that has a private membership or an upscale public course here is going to go with bentgrass.”

### **Different picture**

Bentgrass also seems to be losing the battle in the upscale golfing destination of Palm Springs, Calif., and in parts of the Southwest. Patrick Gross, an agronomist at the USGA's Southwest Green Section office, says climate and economics returned bermudagrass greens to favor.

“The new bermudagrass varieties are generating a lot of interest,” Gross says. “In Palm Springs, we are seeing high-end courses switching. There is always the status symbol of being

*Continued on page 31*

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