

Bentgrass Gets Expected "Thumbs Up" at 1990 Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium

By Monroe S. Miller

Despite delightful Indian Summer weather the likes of which hasn't been seen in years, nearly 200 people attended the 25th annual Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium in Milwaukee on October 30 and 31.

Drawn by an interesting subject, a slate of quality speakers and the comfortable surroundings of Milwaukee's Pfister Hotel, few went home disappointed. A written survey that nearly everyone at the Wednesday session completed gave clear and resounding approval to the work of the 1990 Symposium committee.

NOER'S FRIEND

WGCSA president Rod Johnson offered the traditional welcome and was followed by morning session chairman Steve Blendell. Steve's first introduction was easy — veteran turfgrass expert Tom Mascaro.

O.J. Noer first inspired Mascaro's interest in golf turf and he spent a lot of time travelling with Noer. Mascaro associated O.J. with his ever-present camera, good scotch and Milorganite!

Mascaro used his time on the program to discuss the familiar golf course topic of dew. Despite its recognized significance, little research has been completed on the subject.

Even the word is a misnomer, according to Mascaro. What most call dew is really exudated water — fluid that is actually pumped out of the plant.

There are a couple of fundamental differences between dew and guttated water. Dew is water of condensation;



A familiar marquee at The Pfister.

guttated water contains salts. Guttated water has a precise arrangement on plant leaves; dew does not. Disease (fungi spores) grows profusely on exudated water, poorly in water.

Tom strongly recommended removing "dew", through syringing, poling or some mechanical means.

OLD BENTGRASS

Bentgrass fairway turf at Bloomfield Hills Country Club was the subject of Kevin Dushane's lecture. Dushane, speaking at the Symposium for the second time, presented a slide program of his maintenance of BHCC's original bentgrass fairways.

He knows his predominantly bentgrass fairways contain Penncross and Penneagle — he's overseeded with those varieties — and suspects Sea-

side, South German, Arlington, Congressional and Washington bents.

The course was built in 1909 and remodelled by the great Donald Ross in 1920. Dushane's management suggests deep respect for the golf course. He bases his plans on maintaining the bentgrass population and on presenting the best playing surface possible.

Less water, less fertilizer and less fungicide are keys. One to 2 pounds N/M, 4 pounds K/M, 9 fungicide applications and lightweight mowing have proven successful for him.

Other routine features of the Bloomfield Hills fairway management program are a daily, physical removal of dew, seeding of fairway divots, clipping removal and a 1/2" height of cut.

The most important thing done all year, according to Kevin, is aeration. He uses small area aerifiers in the fall months.

Verticutting is a procedure dictated by his high bentgrass populations. The BHCC fairways are verticut 5 or 6 times each season with greensmower verticuts. He removes every other tine because of the limited horsepower of these machines. This lowers the risk of hydraulic leaks.

THE NOON LUNCHEON

MMSD's Jim Spindler served as host of the noon luncheon. Introductions included the Milorganite staff, the Symposium committee and head table guests.

After a moment of silence for the late Harry Gill, Jim Latham led a reminis-



The session chairmen — Blendell, Waddington and Norton.



The audience in a grand room at The Pfister.

cence of the past 25 years of the Symposium. Names from the past like Crewe, Stamfl, Shiley and Verhaalen were mentioned as important in starting the Symposium. And as nearly everyone knows, Charlie Wilson was absolutely critical in getting the whole program off the ground.

The format of registration charges supplemented by MMSD's payment of speaker expenses has been very successful. Latham also attributed 25 years of success to the single topic format, a program that gives speakers adequate time to develop a subject, and a more relaxed atmosphere that exists in a hotel and sometimes doesn't on a college campus.

The format also included a luncheon and afternoon social hour without an evening banquet. This set the Symposium even further apart from other more traditional educational meetings.

Finally, any proceeds from the meeting were funnelled into the O.J. NOER RESEARCH FOUNDATION. That has enriched the foundation by \$26,000 over the years.

THE WISCONSIN DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

The entire history of the Symposium has seen Jim Latham either in the audience or at the podium. More often than not he has been involved in the planning as a member of the planning committee. That is why the members of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association chose the luncheon of the anniversary meeting to present Jim with the WGCSA's Distinguished Service Award. The significance of the award is that it is given so seldom; it has been awarded only eight times in the Association's history.



FINALLY, DR. DUICH!

It seems significant that the silver anniversary of the Symposium had a giant in our industry on the program. Dr. Joseph Duich, professor of turf-grass science at Penn State University, filled that role perfectly. He was introduced by session chairman Gordy Waddington.

Dr. Duich remarked that he probably held the record for turning down invitations to the Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium more than anyone else! This year was the first year in his career that he wasn't teaching two courses during the fall term, allowing him to travel to Milwaukee. He commented that fellowship is important to him, and he sure felt it at this meeting.

Duich's lecture focused on two subjects: 1.) fraud involving the Penncross variety name, and 2.) current creeping bentgrass research programs.

Few were aware of the depth and seriousness of the problem involving bo-

gus Penncross. It was brought on by the 1984 failure in the seed fields and the subsequent seed shortages. That shortage, coupled with an increasing demand, tempted dishonest seed brokers and sellers to sell low quality seed as Penncross.

This fraud led to fake bags and counterfeit certification tags. The trusting customer, in every case, was the loser.

Sometimes the losses were enormous. An \$87 million overseas project was seeded with bogus Penncross and the results were disastrous.

The problems associated with tracking down and prosecuting the guilty are formidable. Duich spent significant time explaining how evidence is developed; a good bit of that is high technology work. Much of the frustration felt by Duich and others affected by this problem is the legal system itself — lawyers, inadequate punishment and excessive costs.

He offered some advice for any of us



Sketches by THE GRASS ROOTS illustrator Gene Haas.



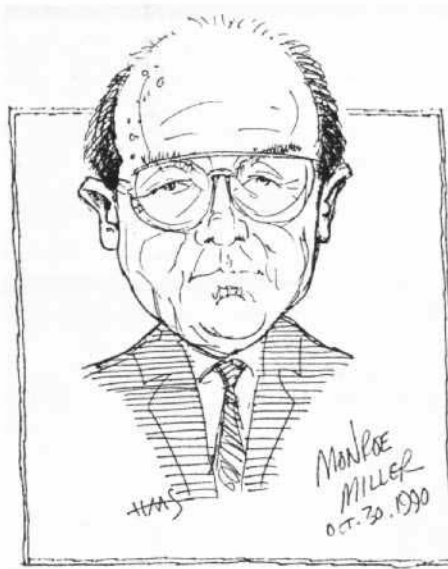
involved with Penncross (or any other) seeding projects:

1. Save all certification labels.
2. Keep accurate records of what seed is used on which features or areas.
3. Record the lot numbers and make them part of item 2.
4. Pull representative samples for your own independent seed test.
5. Save a representative sample of seed used in a project.

The most interesting thing about the current bentgrass breeding projects at PSU was the close cut study. Included is a plot of bentgrass which will tolerate a $\frac{1}{16}$ " height of cut!

ON THE EDGE

The "Living on the Edge" award belongs to Joel Jackson. He left the Disney World golf courses in Orlando, Florida (1974-1988) for the challenge of one of Arnold Palmer's new golf courses.



Isleworth Country Club is Arnie's new home (or winter home) golf course. He's charged Joel Jackson with the task of maintaining Penncross greens in Florida.

The greens were seeded to Penncross in 1986, and a dedicated effort at keeping a cool season grass growing in warm season conditions has paid off. Jackson's work shows that you can have bentgrass greens in Florida.

A PLAYER'S PERSPECTIVE

Gene Haas, executive director of the Wisconsin State Golf Association, left the Symposium with two titles: 1.) best lecture title with "Spinners and Flyers — A Golfer's A-grass-ive Approach to the Game"; and 2.) lecture with the best combination of wit and humor. It was, in a word, classic Gene Haas.

Gene presented a player's perspective on the improving fairway conditions in Wisconsin, and applauded those improvements. He encouraged

golf course superintendents to continue this upgrade, offering assurance the golfers are willing to pay for them.

Haas said the full parking lots at Blackwolf, SentryWorld, et. al. are evidence that competitive players are actually searching for improved conditions. His advice — "go for bentgrass, if possible."

NEW TRADITION

It may be that a new Symposium tradition was born this year — the Wisconsin panel. The group of Wisconsin golf course superintendents — Ozaukee's Wayne Otto, Milwaukee County's Greg Youngs and Blackhawk's Monroe Miller — gave brief summaries of "why they maintain the turf they do."

Otto talked about striving toward increasing his existing bentgrass. Youngs explained the county's plan to improve their fairway conditions, and Miller discussed management of fairways consisting almost entirely of *Poa annua*. The panel also fielded questions from the audience.

Cedar Creek C.C.'s Pat Norton opened the Wednesday morning session with an introduction of Bob Vavrek, USGA Green Section Agronomist. Bob discussed thatch and its control of bentgrass fairways.

He focused on factors that increase thatch production — high N, specific cultivars and higher heights of cut — and those which can decrease thatch decomposition, things like certain pesticides, low pH, anaerobic conditions and lower temperatures and moisture.

From there he talked about advantages thatch offers ($\frac{1}{4}$ " — insulation from soil extremes, some reduction in compaction and the addition of resil-



ience to playing surfaces — and some serious disadvantages — pesticide tie up, scalping, shallow rooting and a source of insects and diseases.

Finally, Bob offered some control measures: topdressing (easily the best control method), core cultivation and reincorporation, vertical mowing/slicing and power raking. He is also convinced spiking can be beneficial.

OLD TRADITION

The Chicago Golf Club is long on tradition; the club is one of the founding members of the USGA. One of their most tightly held traditions is maintaining bluegrass for their fairway turf.

CGC golf course superintendent Bill Whitley presented an excellent discussion on the golf course itself and the management of the bluegrass fairways.

The CGC has hosted a substantial number of championships, almost all of them PRIOR to 1928. He believes the reason for that is the bluegrass fairway turf — it does not allow the 1/2" height of cut required by such events. Because of that, Bill sees no future for Kentucky bluegrass fairways on private clubs; the grass simply cannot supply the conditions most players want.

There are a couple of factors that might encourage a move to bluegrass in the future. The most obvious is the imposition of water restrictions. Another is an increase in environmental regulation.

THE GCSAA

Greg Grigg is a director of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. He dealt with stress management of bentgrass. Educated at Utah State (B.S.) and Michigan State (M.S.), Gary spent ten years in golf course construction before settling at the Shadow Glen Golf Club in Kansas.

His experience in construction and grow-in has given him wide knowledge of bentgrass culture in the hot climates



An ice carving honoring our silver anniversary.

of Texas, Arizona and Kansas, areas where stress management is critical.

According to Grigg, principal stress management factors are:

1. Cutting height
2. Air movement and shade caused by too many trees
3. Soil factors of low oxygen, excess water, deficient water, high soil temperatures and algae growth
4. pH
5. Salts, especially in southwest U.S.
6. Some minor element deficiencies
7. Disease and insect pests
8. Thatch
9. Layering.

Stress is especially serious when cool season grasses are growing in hot environments.

THE USGA

Stan Zontek returned to Wisconsin to wrap up the Symposium. This long held tradition of having a USGA agronomist summarize the education sessions differed this year only because

Zontek assumed the task for Jim Latham. Latham's job for 1990 was tracing the Symposium history at the Tuesday luncheon.

Stan's own history as a USGA agronomist is nearly as long as the Symposium's. His 20 years of experience gave him the chance to put a real perspective on this Wisconsin meeting. It's his view that the Wisconsin Symposium has prospered for two reasons — no concurrent sessions and a format of golf turf only.

A look back over a quarter of a century by Zontek reveals tremendous change. The year the Symposium began, Stanley's father had a good position as a superintendent and made \$13,500 along with a pickup truck!

Greens were cut at 3/16" to 1/4" and fairways were commonly bluegrass maintained at 1 1/4 to 1 1/2" and were cut with pull frames. Irrigation was coming on strong and with it came *Poa annua*; the fescues checked out. Putting greens were watered with roller bases and hoses.

Twenty-five years ago golf course superintendents were greenkeepers and the educational offerings were a mere fraction of what is available today.

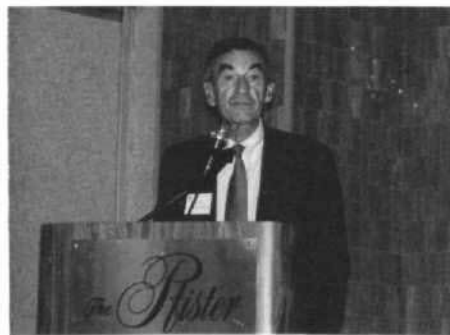
Stan suggested the silver anniversary of the Symposium was a celebration of change. We have the best maintained golf courses ever, the best playability and the best equipment ever. Golfers experience far less turf loss, play on lower heights of cut and have better holding greens. And the golf course superintendents of 1990 are the best educated ever and have become true professionals. "They've taken grasses 1,000 miles beyond their natural zones of adaptation," Stan said.

The future, in his opinion, will focus on the environment. "We'll all have to be environmental activists," he said.

And so the 1990 Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium ended, with full respect for the past and anticipation of the future.



Jim Latham accepts the WGCSA Distinguished Service Award.



Professor Joe Duich finally makes it to the Symposium podium.



The wit and advice from Gene Haas was greatly appreciated.

1990 SYMPOSIUM AWARDS

Best Quote: By Stan Zontek, while discussing the most indispensable manager of a golf club situation: "Golf is played on grass, not on a hamburger or on an Izod shirt."

Second Best Quote: By Wayne Otto, during the Wisconsin panel discussion about recession impacts on golf course budgets and areas where cuts might occur, like tree trimming: "Golf isn't played in the trees."

Best Dressed Award: Goes to the golf course workers at the turn and earliest part of the century when the uniform of the day included a sport coat and necktie! Many of us wish some of



The only two who have been at all 25 Symposiums — USGA agronomist Jim Latham and piano player Sam Fugiasco.

the attendees of the Symposium in 1990 knew when to wear a coat and tie.

Best New Disease Control Advice: From Gary Grigg, during a discussion of the disease control necessary in shaded conditions, gave us the name of the three best fungicides in the world — Homelite, McCulloch, and Stihl!

Most Collectible Item: The program; this is a keeper. Designed by MMSD's Terry Ward, it really does commemorate the Symposium's Silver Anniversary.

Best Compliment Paid: From Dr. Duich, for the fellowship he noticed at our meeting. He said that was important to him; it is to many of us, too.



Chicago Golf Club's Bill Whitley.



Our longtime friend and counsel, Stan Zontek.



GCSAA director Gary Grigg.

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