

Symposium 2005: The Right Choice

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club



The Symposium has quite a reputation to live up to — the expectations are always high for the only true golf turf symposium in America. The subject for 2005 — “Grasses: So many choices it’s a pain in the grass,” — once again drew the finest presenters on the subject from, literally, around the world. And when Bob Vavrek finished his summary at the end of the second day, the consensus was universal — one of the best meetings ever.

The subject matter matters most, of course. But this meeting was made memorable for a couple of other reasons. First, this is the meeting held during our 75th anniversary year. Our association was founded primarily for educational purposes, so it seems fitting that an educational event like the Symposium brought our anniversary year to a close.

As the result of a heroic effort by Gene Haas, we were able to see, for the first time, his latest book, *“CARING FOR THE GREEN - The History of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association.”* Two years of research, work and writing resulted in a terrific that records for all time the first 75 years of our association. Gene and Diane were with us at the end of the first day and Gene patiently signed a couple of hundred books for those in attendance. For this ink stained editor, it was an event that will never leave me.

And this year’s Symposium was of note because it celebrated its 40th anniversary!

I had to stop and have a thought for those who started this venerable meeting — they were visionary in their planning for an event that would last this long. It did what it

was supposed to do — further the education of golf course superintendents and keep the revered name of O.J. Noer in the mind of superintendents for generations to come.

I spent some time talking to two individuals who attended the very first Symposium 40 years ago — Joe Deschler and Ray Knapp. In fact, Ray Knapp may be the only living person who has attended all 40 of the Symposia! And Joe was on the committee that planned the first Symposium, along with Jim Latham, Charlie Wilson, Bob Welch and Al Kress. Amazing.

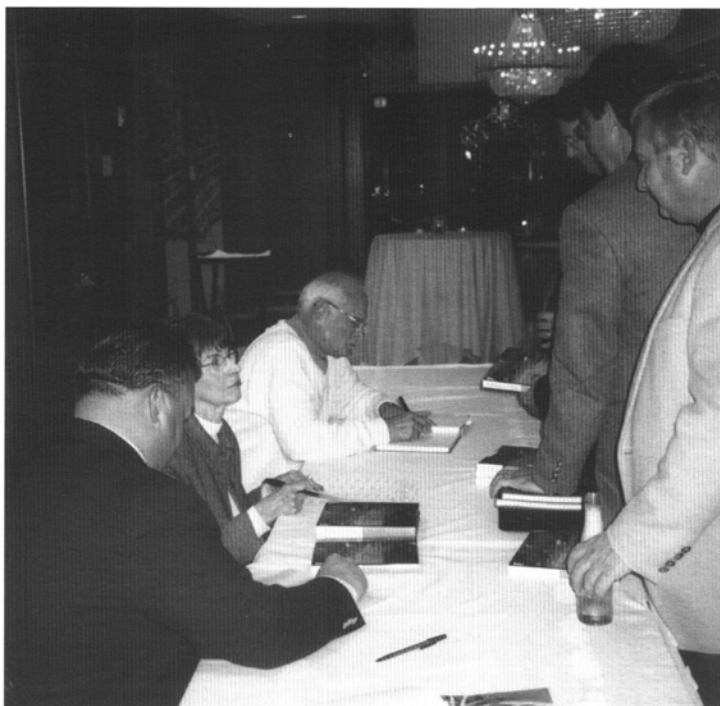
What a line up of speakers. Dr. John Stier was given the role as keynote speaker, an honor for him to be sure. John did a great job of setting the stage for the rest of the meeting, and of all the points he made, I will most remember this one: “There are thousands and thousands of grasses available to

use, but we only make use of a couple of dozen of them.”

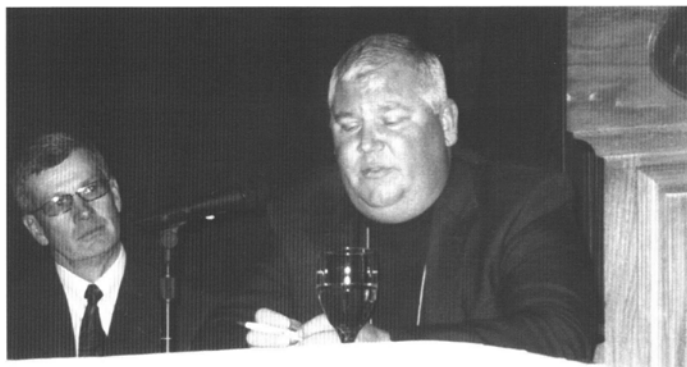
The history of the origin of turfgrasses goes to Eurasia and the grazing pressure from cattle — the natural selection resulted from wear and continuous defoliation. Few realize that the turfgrass seed industry that has developed is the second largest seed industry, exceeded only by corn.

John covered all of the major turfgrasses used in the northern part of the country, noting along the way that Kentucky bluegrass is used most frequently. Many of us were pleased with his review of the seldom used Colonial and Velvet bentgrasses, as well as with the information presented about Supina bluegrass.

Dr. David Huff, well-known turf breeder from Penn State, gave up the Penn State conference to come to Kohler and speak at our meeting.



Gene and Diane Haas, along with Dave Brandenburg, at the ‘Caring For the Green’ book signing.



Dave Ward and Dan Barrett discussed grow-in problems.



Panelist Jake Renner.



From St. Andrews, Scotland and the R&A, Steve Issac. He's also a poet.

Currently he is known primarily because he has a *Poa annua* breeding program. As he pointed out, this is an interesting situation coming from an institution that has led the way in breeding improved bentgrasses!

His thumbnail sketch of the breeders in the turf seed industry was interesting. In 1960 Profs Grau and Musser at Penn State were it; they were followed by Duich at Penn State, Funk at Rutgers and Burton of Georgia, an increase of one. Today, Dr. Huff estimated the number of turfgrass breeders around the country at 60.

An article by Dr. Kidd of the UW-Madison in the journal *Biotech* (11:268) quoted the value of turf seed at \$580 million, exceeded only by corn at \$1 billion and followed by soybeans at \$300 million and wheat at \$200 million. Turf seed is big business.

Dr. Huff, when reflecting on pursuing an improved annual bluegrass plant, spoke of the "three D's" of plant breeding — dwarf, dark green and dense. Of course, *Poa* has one or two of those characteristics. If he can solve some of the shortcomings, he may really have something.

The international turfgrass community was represented by a STRI staff person from the UK — Steve Issac. Steve is now the assistant director of golf course

maintenance for the R&A. In general, he spoke to European issues that more than likely will reach our shores in the future — the issues of pests, fertilizer and water. Frequently mentioning the key word "sustainability," Steve reviewed their use of fescues, *Poa annua*, browntop bentgrass, and the bentgrasses. If you want to visit their website, the address is www.bestcourseforgolf.org.

Steve was a fascinating person to listen to, enlightening and perceptive and experienced in the way of golf in the linksland. And he is a poet; enjoy his poem,

ODE TO FESCUE

*Art thou the grass of heath and links
That keepers of green aspire to.
Thou art, thou art that hallowed grass,
Thou art the wispy fescue.*

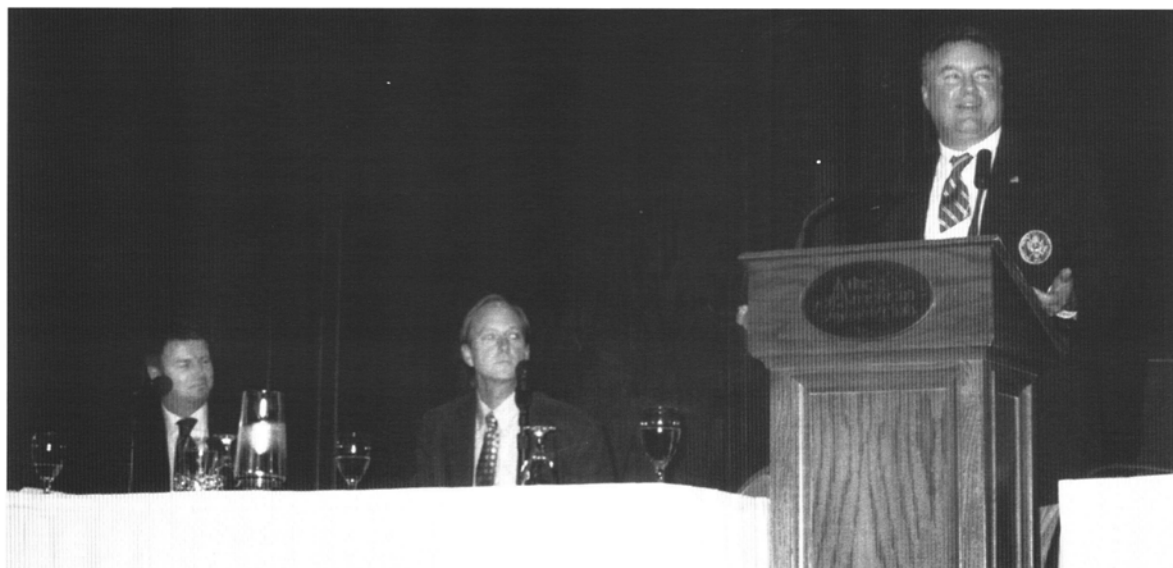
*Of green, and fairway and tempting rough,
Our ball we try to rescue.
With ne'er a feed nor water too,
Thou worthy, faithful fescue.*

Steve Issac
11/16/05

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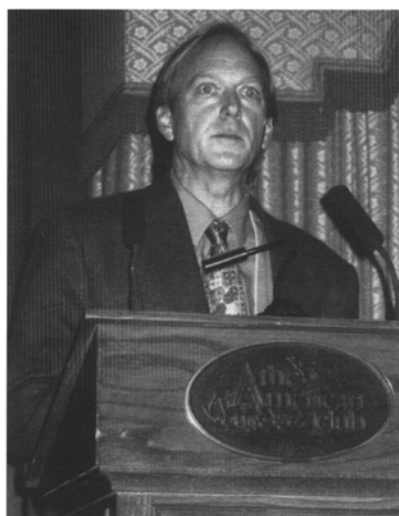
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Steve Issac, Dr. David Huff, and the USGA's Bob Vavrek.



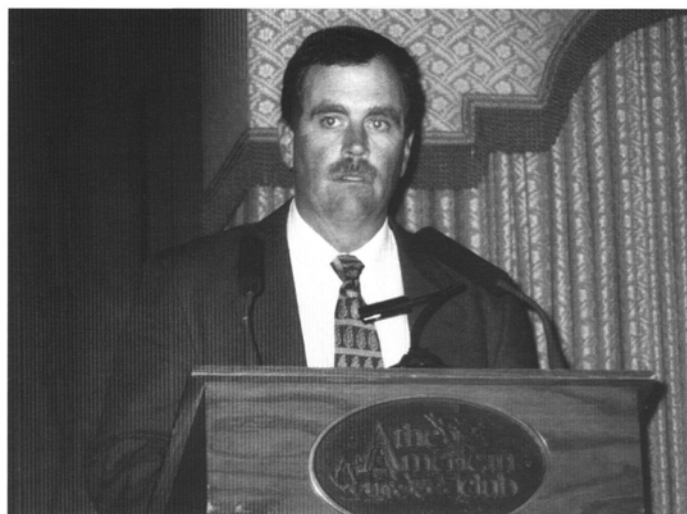
Mark Grundman from Jacklin Seed.



Dr. David Huff, *Poa annua* breeder from Penn State.



Keynote speaker Dr. John Stier, UW-Madison.



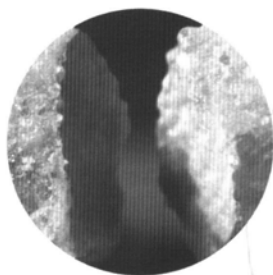
President-elect Mike Lyons, Old Hickory Golf Club.

Dr. Bob Shearman traveled from Lincoln and the University of Nebraska to lecture about the NTEP program, along with a dozen other current issues in the golf turf business. Jon Jennings gave an excellent presentation on the naturalization of the Chicago Golf Club, which focused not only on the final product, but the rough road in getting there. Mark Grundman's career in the seed business has covered a lot of years now, and the wisdom of those years of experience came through in his lecture about successes and failures with seeding.

The panel discussion is a popular feature of the Symposium of late, and this year's panel of Jake Renner, Dave Ward, Dan Barrett and Bob Vavrek was tops. Of particular interest was the portion of the discussion regarding straight sand greens and problems of sand drifting in the wind!



From the University of Nebraska at Lincoln — Dr. Bob Shearman.



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Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposia

First*	1966	Winter Injury (Bulletin No. 5)
Second	1967	The Physical Nature of Soils
Third	1968	POA ANNUA
Fourth	1969	Satisfying the Golfer
Fifth	1970	The Chemical Nature of Soil
Sixth	1971	Where are We Going in Golf Course Management?
Seventh	1972	Recycling Golf Course Wastes
Eighth*	1973	Thatch
Ninth	1974	Water Movement in Soils
Tenth	1975	A New Deal for an Old Course
Eleventh	1976	Living with POA ANNUA Species
Twelfth	1977	Keeping Your Head on Straight
Thirteenth	1978	Fast Grass
Fourteenth	1979	Research
Fifteenth*	1980	Sand - On and In Golf Greens
Sixteenth*	1981	Management Requirements for Sand Greens and Sand Top-Dressed Greens
Seventeenth	1982	Getting to the Roots of the Matter
Eighteenth*	1983	The Facts and Fallacies of POA ANNUA Management
Nineteenth	1984	Directions in Golf Course Management
Twentieth	1985	Grooming - The State of The Art - New Problems for New Times
Twenty-first	1986	The Micronutrients - Who Needs Them?
Twenty-second	1987	Impressions - A Memorable Golf Course (First to Lasting)
Twenty-third	1988	Water Management - A Cultural Practice for all Conditions
Twenty-fourth	1989	Optimizing Pest Management - Strategies to Maximize Results
Twenty-fifth	1990	Bentgrasses - New Old Right or Wrong
Twenty-sixth	1991	Traffic - How much can you bare?
Twenty-seventh	1992	The Green and Tee Complex - Renovating the Surrounds
Twenty-eighth	1993	Winterkill - The Causes And Solutions?
Twenty-ninth	1994	Golf In The Year 2010 The Game, The Job, The Challenge
Thirtieth	1995	Earth, Soil, H ₂ O
Thirty-first	1996	You Can't See The Trees For The Turf
Thirty-second	1997	"If You Build It They Will Come" Putting Green Construction
Thirty-third	1998	"What You Seed Is What You Get" Putting Green Establishment
Thirty-fourth	1999	Showtime! Developing the Playing Surface
Thirty-fifth	2000	The Ins and Outs of Bunkers
Thirty-sixth	2001	Emerging Problems and Pests
Thirty-seventh	2002	Doing More With Less - Resource, Time and Money Management
Thirty-eighth	2003	POA - Twenty Years Later
Thirty-ninth	2004	Soils - Managing the Pressures
Fortieth	2005	Grasses - So Many Choices, It's a Pain in the Grass

*Proceedings

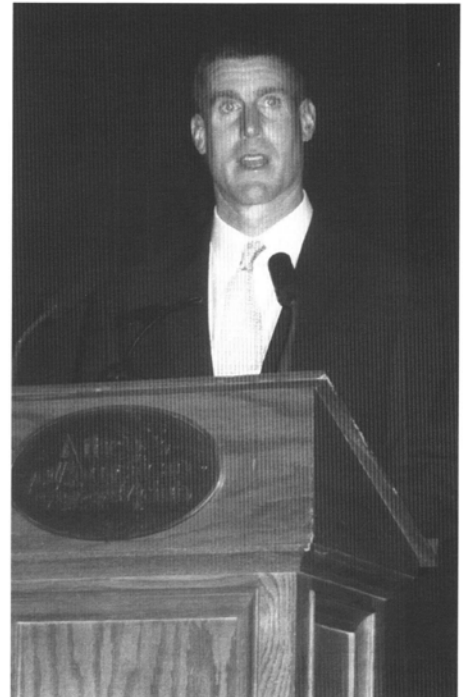
Bob Vavrek plays a pivotal role in the Symposium, hosting speakers before the meeting, carrying a head full of questions when the program slows a bit, and serving as the roundup speaker at the end of the meeting. Hats off to a great asset to Wisconsin for a job well done, again this year.

As they always have, the Symposium committee presented a program that exceeded expectations. Thanks to the MMSD and Milorganite and Shelly Biro for their tremendous support. Of course, everyone's interest after the educational program is putting some more money in the foundation that carries O.J. Noer's name.

Before many weeks have passed, this committee will meet to evaluate this year's program and beginning the planning for next year. I can hardly wait.



Two years of a 'job well done' for now WGCSA past president Marc Davison.



Jon Jennings, Chicago Golf Club superintendent.

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A Symposium Visit With Ray Knapp

Back in the days when the Symposium was held in the Pfister Hotel in downtown Milwaukee, I frequently ate breakfast in the Green House Restaurant in the Pfister with Ray Knapp. Ray loved their breakfast hash, which he always ordered (tradition, he said) and which came with an egg cooked on the top of the hash. I couldn't see what he liked about the stuff, but Ray always cleaned his plate!

I ate breakfast with Ray again this year at the Symposium. I knew that he had attended all 40 of the meetings, so naturally I wanted to know which was his favorite. He didn't hesitate when he answered, "The first one that featured sand topdressing."

Dr. John Madison, long deceased, was gaining a lot of interest around the country with his program of sand topdressing. John was from California and had authored a couple of excellent textbooks on



Ray Knapp, maybe (likely!) the only person alive who has attended all 40 Symposia!

turfgrass. He had seen the positive results from sand topdressing in California and did his homework and realized he was promoting a practice the old Scots had used for hundreds of years.

Ray was interested in topdressing because he had seen Leon Teters, owner of the

Wisconsin River Country Club in Wisconsin Rapids, topdress greens when Ray was at Stevens Point Country Club. Ray earned his undergraduate degree from Purdue, and Dr. Bill Daniels was his advisor. Dr. Daniels was known as "The Sandman" to his students because of his interest in sand as a medium for the culture of turf. The Symposium was the catalyst for Ray's leadership nationally in sand topdressing of putting greens. That meeting also inspired Wayne Otto to do the same at Ozaukee CC.

Ray loves The American Club as the site for the Symposium, far and away better than any of the other venues. He was a speaker at least once, giving a lecture about *P. annua*, as he recalls.

One of the most knowledgeable turf men I have ever visited with, I hope the Symposium gives me many more opportunities to visit with Ray Knapp, especially if it's over breakfast. ♣

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