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## THE GRASS ROOTS

THE GRASS ROOTS is a bi-monthly publication of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association. No part of THE GRASS ROOTS may be reprinted without expressed written permission by the editor.

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## ABOUT THE COVER

Cover artist Beverly Bergemann captures the rough beauty of the 17th hole at Whistling Straits Golf Course in Haven, WI. The 223 yard par 3 is named Pinched Nerve.

*What gets us into trouble is not what we don't know it's what we know for sure that just ain't so? Mark Twain born Samuel Langhorne Clemens, American author and humorist*

- 1835 - 1910

This quote from Clemens reminds us to take the fall season to re-evaluate our practices and policies to ensure we are not assuming the current way is the best or only way.



# Customer Service

By **Brian Zimmerman**, Executive Director, Cleveland Metroparks, WGCSA President

It all starts with a simple hello or good morning. Mr. Miller what will it be nine or eighteen? Cart? All too often the simple things like this are overlooked when serving customers. I have found as I have traveled the country I seem to notice these little things that make a good impression on me.

I recently was at a Starbucks drive-through in the middle part of Ohio and noticed an unusual tip jar. The concept was a very simple one, two tip jars with competing items. The contest that day was Pac-man vs. space invaders. Pac-man was leading the charge on this early morning. Above it they had the results of last week of face offs. I commented to the coffee barista how cool of an idea that was. She indicated they have seen their tips grow almost 25 percent since the competition was put into place. It gave the customer a chance to interact with the staff and engage them.

How do Superintendents, Golf Professionals and the General Manager tie in great customer service? It makes no difference in my book whether you are at a top end club or a public facility. Customer service matters. All of this starts with good communication between the Golf Professional, Course Superintendent and the Club Manager. Then,



hiring the right type of staff to provide the quality customer service that will bring people back and make them feel that they are appreciated as a member or paying daily fee customer.

The interaction between the management team can take an average experience to an above average one by keeping everyone on the same page. This does take effort on all parties involved. I have heard all the reasons that communication fails, like the pro is on the range giving and lesson and can't be bothered, or the Superintendent is out checking conditions the list goes on and on. We as managers need to understand that we are part of the solution. We can make the difference by going the extra mile by taking the time to let clubhouse and pro shop staff know what is going on in the maintenance department.

What I am really trying to get across is take the time to notice great customer service in other operations and figure out what you can take from your experience and apply to your operation. It will pay dividends in the end.

I can say this has been one tough summer on staff throughout the country. Hang in there winter is right around the corner! 🌱

## Coming Events

**Nov 16 - WGCSA Fall Business Meeting and Election**  
American Club, Kohler

**Nov 16 & 17 - Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium**  
Kohler

**December 7 - NGLGCSA Annual Meeting, Pine Grove CC**  
Iron Mountain, MI

**January 5-7 - Northern Green Expo**  
Minneapolis Convention Center, MN

**January 18 - Wisconsin Turfgrass & Greenscape Expo**  
Wisconsin Dells

**Jan 19-21 - Mid-America Horticulture Trade Show**  
Navy Pier, Chicago, IL

**Feb 7-11 - Golf Industry Show**  
Orlando FL

**March 1 & 2 - NGLGCSA Education Symposium**

**March 9 & 10 - Reinders 20th Turf and Irrigation Conference**  
Waukesha Expo Center, Waukesha



## I'm Seeding a New Green: What About Cultivar X?

By Dr. John Stier, Department of Horticulture, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Despite all the rain, the heat, the humidity and everything else, in some ways this year was just like most other years. That's a good thing: after a couple of years of little to no activity it seems that golf course renovations are starting again. Hopefully soon the renovations will be followed by new construction. I could tell renovations are being done because more people contacted me to talk about cultivar selection.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison has run cultivar evaluations at the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Educational Facility in Madison since before I arrived in 1997. The most common cultivar trials are those that are sponsored by the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP). Trials are generally seeded in late summer, just about the time that all your student helpers and ours return to school. Trials run for a period of 4 to 5 years. Data we collect include percent germination, spring greenup, and turf quality monthly during the growing season.

Sometimes we also collect information on disease resistance, *Poa annua* invasion, amount of turf cover at various seasons, leaf texture, genetic color, and turf density.

The 2003 NTEP bentgrass putting green trial was the most recently completed putting green trial. It was seeded in late summer 2003. Turf quality data were collected from 2004 through 2007, compiled and analyzed in 2008, and posted on the NTEP website by 2009 ([www.ntep.org](http://www.ntep.org)). The site has a tremendous amount of data. The most used/useful data are usually turf quality. Turf quality is rated on a 1 to 9 scale, with 9 equal to excellent turf and 1 equal to dead or absent turf. A rating of 6 or better is considered "acceptable". In addition to quality, though, other data often should be considered. Several superintendents have commented to me over the years that they've spent hours poring over the data, and now they want my thoughts as well. Selecting a bentgrass cultivar is a big decision: greens renovation is a rare and

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costly event for a club. If the selected cultivar “fails”, whether due to some environmental factor, disease, or any other variable, very often the outcome reflects on the superintendent.

One source of confusion is the source of the data. The 2003 putting green trial had 26 cultivars planted in 20 states and one Canadian province. Six of the cultivars were velvet bentgrass, which fared poorly in many cases because the management or site conditions favored creeping bentgrass. For example, average velvet bentgrass quality was about 4.6 in Kentucky, 4.0 in New Mexico, and 3.3 in Texas, well below the averages for creeping bentgrass. In New Jersey, velvet bentgrass scores tended to be similar to those for any given creeping bentgrass. Obviously velvet bentgrass did not perform well in the southern or SW states, so there’s no need to look at those data. It’s tempting to look at the overall quality data averaged across all states, but if certain states or management techniques are unfavorable for a given species or cultivar, the average may be relatively meaningless, too.

My advice is to look at the data generated from the most similar climate and management conditions (e.g., mowing height, nitrogen rate, soil type) to the situation in question. Thus, if a golf course has sand based putting greens and the 2003 NTEP trial site in Wisconsin was a silt loam soil, it makes sense to look at data from Minnesota, as their trial was conducted on a sand root zone.

People also wonder what the numbers really mean. For example, ‘Declaration’ received the highest overall average quality score during the period 2004-2007 (Table 1). However, it didn’t necessarily rate the best quality in each month over that time, nor necessarily even the best average score within a given year. One would have to look at each year’s data on the NTEP website to get an idea of the amount of variation during each year. One of the most important items on each data

Table 1. Putting green turf quality of bentgrass cultivars over a 4-yr period when maintained at 0.125 inch or lower height of cut (Adapted from 2003 National Turfgrass Evaluation Program from 2004-2007 data at [www.ntep.org](http://www.ntep.org)).

Name (test number)	Species	Wisconsin data	Average (11 states)†
Declaration	Creeping	7.5‡	6.6
CY-2	Creeping	7.1	6.6
Shark	Creeping	6.9	6.6
007	Creeping	6.9	6.5
13-M	Creeping	6.9	6.2
Memorial	Creeping	6.8	6.2
Authority	Creeping	6.7	6.6
Tyee	Creeping	6.7	6.6
Penn A-1	Creeping	6.5	6.4
Cobra	Creeping	6.4	6.1
Mackenzie	Creeping	6.2	6.5
Kingpin	Creeping	6.2	6.1
LS-44	Creeping	6.2	6.2
Villa	Velvet	6.7	5.7
Legendary	Velvet	6.5	5.5
Greenwich	Velvet	6.2	5.4
Vesper	Velvet	5.5	5.1
Venus	Velvet	6.5	5.5
Alpha	Creeping	5.9	6.0
Independence	Creeping	5.9	6.3
Pennlinks II	Creeping	5.9	5.5
Bengal	Creeping	5.7	6.0
Benchmark	Creeping	5.7	6.1
T-1	Creeping	5.8	6.1
SR 7200	Velvet	4.8	5.0
Penncross	Creeping	4.7	5.0
LSD		0.9	0.3

† The 11 states were Arkansas, Michigan, North Carolina, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Quebec (Canada), and Wisconsin.

‡ Quality was rated each month of the growing season on a 1 to 9 scale, where 9 = excellent turf, 1 = dead or missing turf, 6=acceptable.

page is the Least Significant Difference (LSD) value. The LSD is a barometer used by statisticians to determine if a value is truly significantly different from another value. If you’ve seen the NTEP plots at the O.J. Noer Facility you’ll likely remember that each variety is planted three different times. For various reasons (soil moisture, edge effect, etc.) each of the three replications often have values different from their counterparts. For example, one cultivar may have rankings of 5, 6, and 7. Another cultivar may have rankings of 4, 6, and 9. The average value for the first cultivar is 6.0 and 6.3 for the second cultivar. The LSD helps account for the amount of variation among the replications for a given cultivar and assigns a degree of certainty that one average value is truly different from

another. To apply the LSD number, subtract it from the largest number: any variety that has a score between the highest number and the remainder is statistically similar to the highest-scoring variety. In the final data set of turf quality for the 2003 NTEP putting green trial, for example, the LSD was 0.9. Declaration had the highest score of any variety, a 7.5 out of a possible 9. Subtract the LSD value (0.9) from 7.5. The resulting value is 6.6. Thus, any cultivar with a 6.6 quality ranking or greater is statistically the same as Declaration. These included CY-2, Shark, 007, 13-M, Memorial, Authority, and Tyee.

Everyone seems to like grass that greens up early in the spring. Theoretically, the first cultivar to greenup should mean it is growing sooner in the year, and will be better

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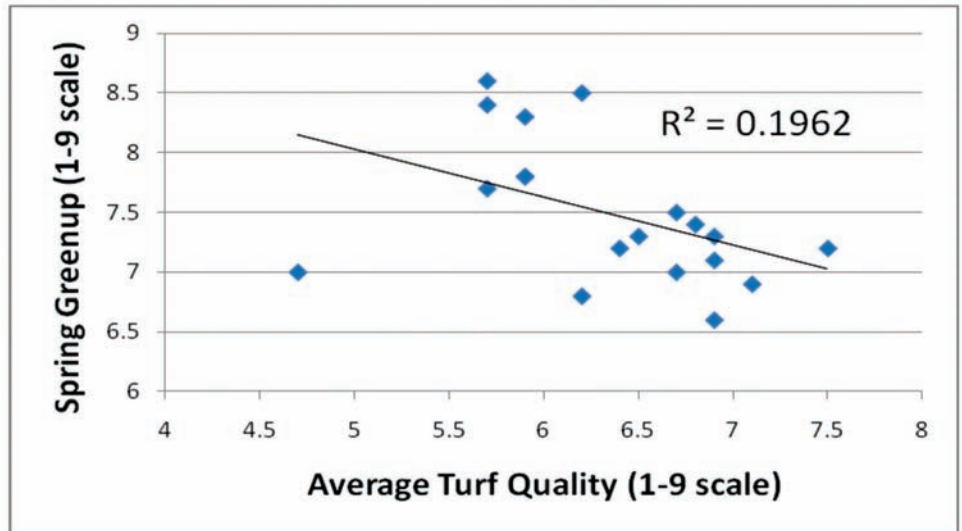
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able to handle summer stress than cultivars that green up later. But being first doesn't always mean being best. Figure 1 shows a slightly negative relationship between spring greenup of the creeping bentgrass cultivars in the 2003 trial and their average turf quality over the entire trial. In some cases, those cultivars that green up early in the spring may just be better growers at cool, wet temperatures. During the height of summer it's possible some of the early greening cultivars can't stand the heat.

Budget reductions from NTEP in 2008 meant many states were unable to host an NTEP trial. At UW-Madison, we did successfully compete for a bentgrass fairway trial but not a putting green test. In order to make lemons out of lemonade, UW-Madison banded together with other states like Michigan and Iowa to develop an even more meaningful bentgrass putting green trial. On our own initiative, we seeded cultivars that were in the 2008 NTEP, and



**Fig. 1. Spring greenup of creeping bentgrass cultivars was a poor indicator of the average turf quality for 20 cultivars from 2004-2007, O.J. Noer Facility, Madison, WI.**

added an extra dimension by using fungicides on only half of each grass plot in order to better evaluate true disease resistance.

We often have superintendents, architects, seed distributors, and breeders out to visit our NTEP plots at the O.J. Noer facility. We're open

five days a week, sometimes six! Another option-come to the WTA field day next summer. All the variety trials are on display at each field day, with a sign listing each cultivar's identity, whether they're part of the formal tour or not. 🌿

## WGCSA Mission Statement

The Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association is committed to serve each member by promoting the profession and enhancing the growth of the game of golf through education, communication and research.

## WGCSA Vision Statement

The Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendent Association is dedicated to increase the value provided to its members and to the profession by:

- Enhancing the professionalism of its members by strengthening our role as a leading golf organization in the state.
- Growing and recognizing the benefits of a diverse membership throughout Wisconsin.
- Educating and promoting our members as leaders in environmental stewardship.
- Offering affordable, high value educational programs at the forefront of technology and service.
- Being key to enjoyment and the economic success of the game of golf.



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# 92nd PGA Championship

By **David Brandenburg**, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

The Straits Course at Whistling Straits Golf Course hosted the worlds best golfers for the 92nd PGA Championship August 9-15th. It was the second go around for the Pete Dye designed layout as it also hosted the 2004 PGA won by Vijay Singh.

You really have to visit the Straits Course to obtain an appreciation for the incredible Pete Dye design. Words cannot describe the elevation changes and the natural "seaside links" look the property features. It is fun to watch spectators as they crest the first hill and get a view of the course and how it seems to fall into Lake Michigan. It really is a jaw dropping experience.

The Kohler Company owned links is designed along two miles of Lake Michigan shoreline in Haven, WI just a few miles north of the 36 hole Blackwolf Run complex in Kohler. Ranked number 3 on Golf Weeks 2010 Top 100 list, the Straits Course is under the care of Michael Lee, Manager of Golf Course Maintenance for the Kohler Company and Christopher Zugel, Golf Course Superintendent at the Straits Course.

The par 72 course is unique to Wisconsin as it features fescue fairways and rough along with its bent-grass greens and tees. The Dye design opened in 1998 and plays to 7,362 yards from the black tees with a challenging rating of 76.7 and slope of 151.

From the 2004 Championship the course has been refined to enhance player strategy. Some new tees were added not for length but to provide different angles into holes along with new chipping areas around the third and sixth greens. The par 4 sixth hole also has a new bunker that cuts into the middle front of the green that appears to split the green into two distinct sides.

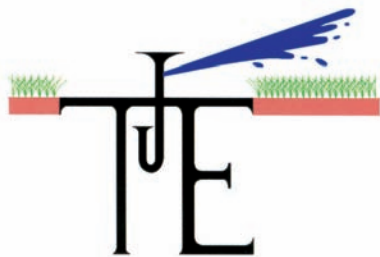
The most talked about changes were to the par-4 500



A small group of the bunker crew works on hole 10 with buckets, shovels and rakes.



The squeegee crew walked from hole to hole to prepare for Wednesday practice rounds.



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yard eighteenth hole where Dye added a second fairway to the left of the creek that runs down the hole. Players looking to make up strokes can take out their drivers and bust one 300 yards over bunkers to a narrow landing area leaving a shorter approach shot. Players comfortable with their score can hit to the right fairway but that does leave a noticeably longer approach shot to a well guarded green.

The tournament does an excellent job handling the crowds with easy access and shuttle buses to get in and out of the tournament. I came in as a media member and just a regular spectator and both trips were quick and easy.

The event was my first experience with press credentials. I appreciate Michael Lee helping me obtain the press badge and allowing me to feel like someone important.



Host Superintendent Chris Zugel on hole 18 after the bleachers were removed.



Barrals of shovels and rakes at the ready for the bunker team.

I must say the press is treated well by the PGA with two air conditioned tents and a constant supply of food and beverages.

From the competition side of things it was a great championship with both young and veteran players making a run at the

Wanamaker Trophy. In the end Germany's Martin Kymer won the event with a score of 11 under 277.

Local favorite Steve Stricker always draws a large gallery and his 68 on Saturday had him in the hunt. However a up and down Sunday

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