

Before Grass, Greens Came in All Varieties

By JAMES HANSEN
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In the early 1900s putting greens in America were not necessarily made of turf, nor were they necessarily green. For some early golf courses, builders simply scalped off areas of suitable size for the putting surfaces.

For others, especially in the south and southwest, greens were made of sand. In some cases, such as Donald Ross Pinehurst Number 2 Course, the sand was oiled; but in most cases it was not. (Pinehurst kept its sand greens until 1935 when Ross replaced them with grass during a complete remodeling. Sawdust was even used with fair results.

In 1921, two of the country's leading turfgrass specialists, Charles V. Piper and Russell A. Oakley of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, wrote in the U.S. Golf Association's Bulletin of the Green Section that, "it is surprising indeed the more experimentation along this line (i.e. the

use of waste products) has not been conducted since there are so many parts of the country where grass greens cannot be maintained or can be maintained only at a prohibitive cost."

One of the most curious materials ever to be used for a putting green was cotton seed hulls. In the late 1910s, in north central Mexico, an Anglo-American cotton company built a course with cotton-seed hull greens near Tlahualilo, about forty miles from Torreon.

Maintaining grass greens in the dry bed of a prehistoric lake, in a region receiving less than eight inches of rain annually, was out of the question - as were sand greens because of the high winds. So the manager of a cotton business, T.M. Fairbairn, turned to a product that he had in abundance and had to dispose of anyway.

One might think that the outer shell-

like covering of cotton seed would make a pretty rough surface, but the USDA observer who putted on the greens wrote that they were "a fast surface very much like that of a billiard table." A considerable amount of lint came with the hulls, binding the mass together. Few weeds penetrated it. It also shed water from the occasional rainstorm and stood up to strong winds.

Cottonseed greens were tried in various locations in the deep south in the 1920's, notably in Texas and Alabama. The basic technique of surface construction involved placing the hulls on the ground, tamping them by hand, and then rolling them into a mat.

(Editor's Note: This article was re-printed from the December 1999 issue of Superintendent News.)

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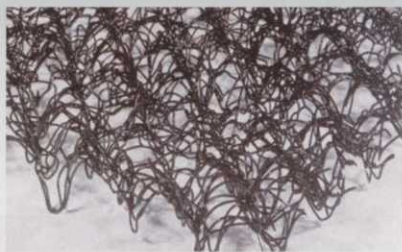
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