

Turfgrass Matters



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Mid-Atlantic Golf Course Superintendents Newsletter

Prince Georges Country Club to host Tuesday, September 10 meeting

by Mike Evans

The original Prince Georges Country Club was built in the early 1920s in Landover, Maryland. In 1980 the Club moved to its current location in Mitchellsville with a meager 180 members.

Although Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay had some architectural input, the golf course was basically designed and built by Algie Pulley. The Club currently has 430 golfing members and receives about 30,000 rounds of golf annually. Larry Ringer, the PGA Golf Professional, came to Prince Georges this spring after 16 years at the Naval Academy.

Since opening for play, the golf course has been challenging golfers and superintendents alike. It measures 7,089 yards from the championship tees, 6,582 and 6,195 from the two sets of men's tees, and 5,652 yards from the forward tees. Par is 72 except for the forward tees where it is 73. The main course features are a 65 acre lake which comes into play on five holes and severely contoured greens.

Construction of the golf course left much to be desired and, although many problems have been corrected, many still remain. The most critical was the construction of the greens and tees. They were built with concrete or masonry sand and no organic amendment. Localized dry spots are a tremendous problem as are areas that constantly remain saturated. This unforgiving "greensmix" causes severe problems during the

summer months. Rebuilding was not a viable option for our Club, so we have embarked on a rigorous deep-tine aerification program using the Verti-Drain with 1 1/8" coring tines. The concrete sand plugs are removed using a Cushman core harvester and the greens are topdressed with Harford TD 1000 at the rate of 6-7 tons per green. Needless to say, this isn't exactly the crew's favorite job. To date, we have performed this operation five times.

The tees were built without drainage on three to four inches of concrete sand and were originally seeded to bentgrass. They failed miserably every summer. We have been on a zoysiagrass conversion program on tees which has worked quite well. To date, 24 tees have been converted and we plan to do all the but shadiest tees.

To aid in coping with our soil-related problems, we purchased a Toro Hydroject 3000 in late July. I am extremely impressed with this piece of equipment and feel confident that it will dramatically improve the quality of our turf in the years to come.

In the spring of 1988, a new Toro irrigation system was installed by Tanto Construction Company. The system uses VT-2 controllers for fairways and VT-4 controllers for tees and greens with a VT-3 video central. The new system has been a major improvement to the golf course and its installation was a tremendous learning experience.

The Club is currently in the process of searching for a golf

course architect to design a landscape master plan to enhance the aesthetics of the golf course. Other major projects slated for the next several years include a new retaining wall, which we hope to be made of stone, to go around the pond on hole number five; new cart paths around the entire course; and renovation of bunkers.

Mike Evans holds a B.S. in agronomy from Penn State. Before moving to Prince Georges CC in 1987 he was assistant superintendent at Burning Tree, and prior to that, assistant superintendent at Congressional.

Mike and his wife Joey, a dental hygienist, are thrilled with baby daughter Lindsey, born nine weeks early on June 22. Although she weighed in at only three pounds and spent six weeks in the hospital, she is now home and doing just fine.

The Meeting

Cocktails: 6:00 - 7:00

Dinner: 7:00

Cost: Dinner, \$25; cash bar

Reservations: 301-381-0030

Directions

From Baltimore—B-W Parkway South to Greenbelt Rd. (Rte. 193). Turn left, go six-seven miles. Turn left onto Woodmore Rd. Make first left (Pleasant Prospect.) Go 3/4 mile. Club is on left.

From Maryland or Virginia—Take 495 to 450 east. Go approximately five miles. Make right on Enterprise Rd. Go 2 1/2 miles. Make left onto Woodmore Rd. Or—take 495 to 214 east (Central Avenue). Go three-four miles. Make left on Enterprise Rd. Go approximately two miles to light. Make right on Woodmore Rd.

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GOLF NOTES

Our September meeting will be at Prince Georges Country Club in Mitchellsville. Tee times will be available from 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

For starting times please call the pro shop at 301-249-6104. Carts are free.

Prizes will be awarded in both the net and gross divisions.

We will also have a Long Drive Contest on the course, so please make plans to play.

Another note. Anyone wish-

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Once again Larry Ott and the staff at Bretton Woods Recreation Center worked very hard to make our annual picnic a huge success.

Thanks, Larry, for a job well done. A special thanks also goes out to Mark Merrick, Ken Ingram and all their helpers for planning and supervising the event.

This week I received our invitation to the Metropolitan Golf Course Superintendents Association annual tournament to be held Tuesday October 15, 1991 at Fenway Golf Club in Scarsdale, NY. The Mid-Atlantic will again enter an 8-man team in the event, but we need to know in advance the names and handicaps of those wishing to participate. The format of play will be the same as last year with four designated as gross and four as net. The team title will be decided by adding the three lowest net and three lowest gross scores. There will also be prizes awarded for low individual gross score, closest to the pin and longest drive. Proof of handicap will be required on the day of the tournament. Anyone interested should contact Scott Wagner or myself.

See you at Prince Georges CC on Tuesday, September 10.

*Nick Vance, CGCS
President, MAAGCS*

ing to play at the National Tournament, please let me know so we can start putting our teams together now.

See you at Prince Georges C.C. on the 10th.

*Scott Wagner
Golf Chairman, MAAGCS*

**SEPTEMBER SPEAKER**

September's speaker is James Belville, Meteorologist in Charge, National Weather Service Forecast Office in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Belville will speak about lightning, a topic that has unfortunately been very much in the news. It is a topic that is critical for people on golf courses, yet one of which the general public is surprisingly ignorant.

Did you know that lightning can strike five miles outside a thunderstorm? Or that during one bad thunderstorm in Northwest Washington several weeks ago there were approximately 1200 cloud-to-ground flashes in the period of an hour over a 10-square-mile area? Mr. Belville will present these and other interesting

**Can lightning strike twice?
Find out at the September meeting.**

and informative facts, will review safety rules and precautions and discuss new tracking technology and how the NWS has used this equipment during golf tournaments like the Kemper and LPGA.

A native of Texas, Mr. Belville earned his B.S. at Texas A&M. He has worked for the NWS for 23 years and was a forecaster in Lubbock and in New Orleans before assuming his post in Washington. His current position in the Forecast Office encompasses managing the resources of NWS over a four-state area: Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, D.C. and part of West Virginia. He played golf a lot in college—almost daily—but over the years has played less and less as his job became more demanding. He hopes to reverse this trend immediately. "Being around all those golf tournaments last year made me really want to start again."

New Fairways for Westwood Country Club

Walter Montross' future is green

by Betty Ford

Under the direction and watchful eye of superintendent Walter Montross, the Westwood Country Club in Vienna, Va. now sports 18 new bentgrass fairways. In a surprisingly short time span, the club's primarily poa annua fairways were transformed into bentgrass turf.

Walter, who started at Westwood in April, 1990, came with a specific plan to transform

We reopened the fairways 37 days later to play.

the fairways. "One of the pressing problems the club had was failure of fairway turf," he says, "predominately because they were of poa annua that had been cultivated for many years. I became convinced from some work I had done at Springfield that bentgrass was a viable option for this area. We put together a package and I, personally, chose that option and convinced the club that was the way to go about it. Because we were 95 percent poa and because the fairways had not been renovated in the last 20 years, the feeling was we needed to completely eliminate everything that was there. The club accepted the proposal."

"In August of last year we sprayed the fairways with Roundup and killed everything. In early September we completely rolled them over—with heavy aeration and drill seeding. We seeded in Penlinks bentgrass. We never closed the golf course with the exception of the day we sprayed and then the day we began renovation. We reopened the fairways 37 days later to play.

They just got better and better as time went on."

"Yet," says Walter, "we are not where we need to be. My feeling is we still have a year to a year and a half to get the fairways up to what I would call bentgrass fairways."

Three factors have presented challenges to Walter and made progress just a bit slower than he would have liked: the single-row irrigation system at Westwood; the fact that the fairways had been predominately poa annua; and good old Mid-Atlantic weather conditions.

Walter began his program hoping that at the end of last year "we would be 60 to 70 percent bent and 30 to 40 poa." The single-row system has caused an interesting phenomenon. "We had tremendous germination of bent in the middle of the fairways and less on the edges where watering was not as efficient. We eventually had to do rollerbasing on the edges to get them to come in.

Really what happened was we achieved the 60 bent, 40 poa—but it was about 80 to 90 percent bent in the middle, and about 50/50 on the edges. So we knew that going into this year we were weak on the edges and there was a lot of poa back out there, although it looked very impressive. The new fairways looked very impressive as to turf density and esthetics. We just had a lot more poa than we'd hoped for."

The club is aware that this irrigation system needs to be modified. Notes Walter, "We are going to put in a new system in the next couple of years and are now trying to forecast the cost of that for long-range planning."

The second hindrance—the

large amount of poa in the fairways—has also complicated matters. "Poa is a prolific producer of seed, and the seed that goes into the ground is viable for 20 years or more so that if you've had a heavy crop of it and it has dropped seed it will re-invade if management stops. There is enough viable seed in the ground right now that no matter what program I'm on, we will always have it as a possible re-invading grass. So, we've done a lot of playing around with various chemical programs this year. We've done some growth retardant work using everybody's product and comparing one to the other. We're going to be doing

One of my professors called the Mid-Atlantic "the armpit of turfgrawing in the United States."

some Progress work this fall. Unfortunately, this herbicide's mode of action also makes the bent susceptible to it, so it's a bit hairy. We're going to experiment with it in small areas. We need to come up with something in the next couple of years that will attack poa. The bottom line is, we're looking at everything and anything."

Finally, weather in the Mid-Atlantic causes no end of headaches for turf professionals. It is one of the most difficult areas in the whole country to grow grass. "We are not one season or the other," notes Walter. "We can have hotter summers than the entire east coast, yet we could turn around this winter and have

See fairways on page 4

Fairways, continued from page 3

temperatures comparable to upstate New York, Vermont, or Maine. Rainfall is sporadic—from intense thunderstorms to long periods without rain. One of my professors called this 'the armpit of turf growing in the United States.'"

Specifically, for Westwood's new fairways, weather has made progress difficult. At the time they seeded last September, conditions were dry—"ideal for us to germinate grass under our regime," says Walter. However, October was very wet, allowing the poa to be competitive. Then, this summer has seen intensive heat. "We can survive 60 days of 90 degree weather. What kills us is when it's hot from May 1 all the

way through. We've had over 30 days of 90 degrees and a couple of 100 degree days." Yet, declares Walter, "My experience has been that the bent is equally tolerant of the heat, with no more disease pressures and no more insect pressures, than ryegrass. This summer just hasn't been a fair test."

Does Walter recommend this program? This is not a program for everyone. It takes commitment of the entire club. While initial installation cost is modest—"our total cost for installing these fairways was less than "\$30,000—maintenance requires a substantial budget. Notes Walter, "You must have a good irrigation budget. A club that's on a low-level budget cannot maintain bentgrass fairways."

It is not, however, the irrigation alone that is costly. Bentgrass requires more maintenance and renovation. It is not a grass that tolerates heavy thatch conditions and Walter plans aerification about three times a year. In addition, bentgrass requires more fungicides—more than the warm-season turfs. "But," says Walter, "I have seen little more disease pressure on the bent than I would have on the rye."

Nor is this a program for a public course. "This is not a management program that fits a public golf course at all." Although the private clubs have experienced higher levels of play than ever this year (the economy is down and people are staying home), and this regime is still doing well under the added stress,

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this would not suit the publics. "If I were at a public course, I would not be mowing fairways at 1/2" and I would want a warm-season turfgrass. We take things a little closer to the edge than the public courses. There is more emphasis on keeping greens speeds up and keeping fairways tight and dry."

For those who are presently mowing light, for those willing to make the commitment, and "especially if you have been growing ryegrass—drilling rye in and trying to reduce poa—this program would be a piece of cake. I can guarantee that under the right conditions, you could redo your fairways and be back in play in 30 days with 80 to 90 percent bent fairways."

Although Walter's new

fairways are now under an early renovation, he knows that in a matter of a few days and with some much-needed rain, they will bounce back quickly. Furthermore, he's looking forward to October and cool weather when bentgrass really shines. "All indications are that everyone is pleased with what we've done. The playing surface has been magnificent."

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by Dean Graves

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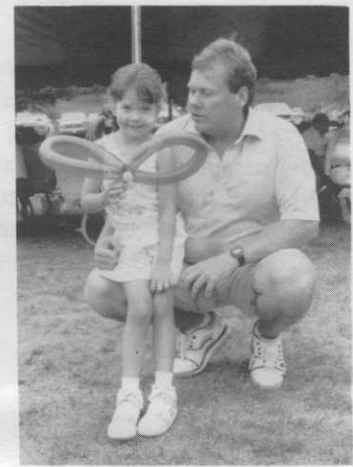
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