

Bentgrass Fairways on a Public Course?

by Bill Shirk, CGCS, Golf Chairman, MAAGCS

As I complete my 21st year as a golf course superintendent in the Mid-Atlantic region, one of the most discussed topics is what type of grass to grow in fairways. There have been many debates on cool-season grasses versus warm season grasses. This article will relate my past experiences and present adventures in fairway grass production.

When I graduated from Penn State in 1972, I went to Seaford Golf and Country Club in Seaford, Delaware. I started with some of the early varieties of perennial ryegrasses which were mostly Manhattan and Pennfine. The fairways quickly improved to the point of being able to play summer rules on a regular basis. The usual maintenance practice of reseeding every year was a constant event. The fungicides sprayed on the fairways increased to combat dollar spot and pythium. Fungicides weren't a major concern as we were directly related to E.I. Dupont Co. and the products Tera LSR, 1991, and Tera SP, were as common and easy to get as household sugar.

In 1978, I moved to Prospect Bay, a new course, and started out with A-34 bluegrass fairways. This bluegrass was very aggressive from early summer to fall and required very little overseeding in the fall. This grass provided an excellent playing environment, but it was very slow to get growing in the spring. It was late May or early June before A-34 would finally get aggressive. As a result, there was a lot of encroachment from other grasses, such as *poa trivialis*, *poa annua*, and more common, bentgrass. Before leaving Prospect Bay, it was my full intention to convert to

bentgrass fairways as it seemed that's what really wanted to grow there. But as everyone knows, I made a move to Queenstown Harbor Golf Links.

This was, and is still, intended to be a very upscale public golf course. The decision was made to have bentgrass fairways and that was the beginning of a very scary time in my professional career. We all know how difficult bentgrass greens and tees are to maintain, but the thought of 40 acres of bentgrass can be somewhat intimidating and sometimes scary. Penneagle was chosen because it is one of the less aggressive bentgrasses and hopefully would cut down on thatch problems. As some of the fairways are reaching their second anniversary, the summer of 1992 was a very good one for them.

They have improved tremendously since the Superintendent-Pro tournament in May. They now look mature and truly provide a great playing surface.

I'd like to highlight some aspects of the maintenance program. I mow at 1/2 inch with Toro's 223D and collect all clippings. I fertilize with a 16-16-16 blend using Nutralene. Two

applications were made in the spring and two in the fall at 1 lb/m. Scott's 29-2-3 fluid fertilizer was used at 0.3 lb/m per application starting in July and repeated every two to three weeks until September.

TGR Turf Enhancer was applied the first week of June at 1/2 lb/acre. This created some uneasy moments for a two- to three-week period. The use of TGR at this rate did cause a lot of discoloration but this downside was far outweighed by the vast improvement in the density and lateral movement of the turf. While using TGR, mowing was cut from twice a week to once a week with very little clipping removal. Last September and mid-October, TGR was again applied

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at the rate of 1/4 lb/acre for each application. This has cut back the discoloration from the TGR. My plan for next year is to use Cutless spring and summer and TGR in the fall.

For my fungicide program, I would spray 0.25 oz/m Banner plus 1.5 oz/m 2787; wait three weeks and spray with 0.25 oz/m Banner plus 0.25 oz/m Bayleton; wait three weeks again. This was my main diet of spraying. I went once with a full rate of 2787, 6 oz/.m, and once with a full rate of 26019, 4 oz/m, just to give some variation. My main spray applications were these very light rates and the results were great, also a big savings in the chemical budget. Spraying for pythium was done preventively during July and August using Subdue and Banol at the recommended rates.

One other thing I did was hire

two full-time people to do nothing but fill in fairway divots. For the year, 40 tons of topdressing mix has been used specifically for this purpose. I felt the added cost was more than beneficial as it helped keep the fairways level and provided a better atmosphere for the bentgrass to fill over and keep out unwanted weeds. Dimension was applied the first week of May for crabgrass control. I feel Dimension will give me flexibility in the aerating program which will be not to aerate this fall in hopes of cutting down on the *poa annua* germination. I plan to do two fairway aerifications in spring and early summer. This is a new management technique for me and only time will tell if it succeeds in keeping *poa annua* out of the bentgrass fairways.

Now, I'm not preaching that bentgrass is the best turfgrass for fairways. There are many factors

to consider and bentgrass may not be for every club or golf course. But bentgrass is gaining popularity in the Mid-Atlantic and I am pleased with its performance at Queenstown. I'm sure in years to come we will still be debating which is the best fairway turfgrass.

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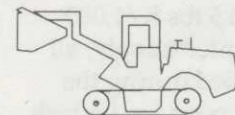
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