



Crews prepare the 12th green on the North course for reseeding. Every green on the North course was renovated.

A CHALLENGING COURSE

Olympia Fields' two courses have presented more challenges for the superintendent than they have for the golfers.

by Jeff Sobul, assistant editor

Brian Chalifoux might as well have started from scratch. He practically did anyway.

When he took over as superintendent at Olympia Fields Country Club in the fall of 1983, he had no idea of the amount of work needed to renovate the club's two courses. But when the courses started showing signs of Toronto C-15 bentgrass decline, he started getting notions. Three years and two renovation programs later, the task continues.

Major project

In those three years, Chalifoux and

his staff of 12 full-timers and 40 peak season employees have completed fairway renovations on both the North and South courses and complete tee and green renovation on the North course.

In the fall of 1984, fairways on the North course were about 50-50, bentgrass to poa annua. South course fairways were 65 or 70 percent bentgrass, Chalifoux says. North course greens weren't any better.

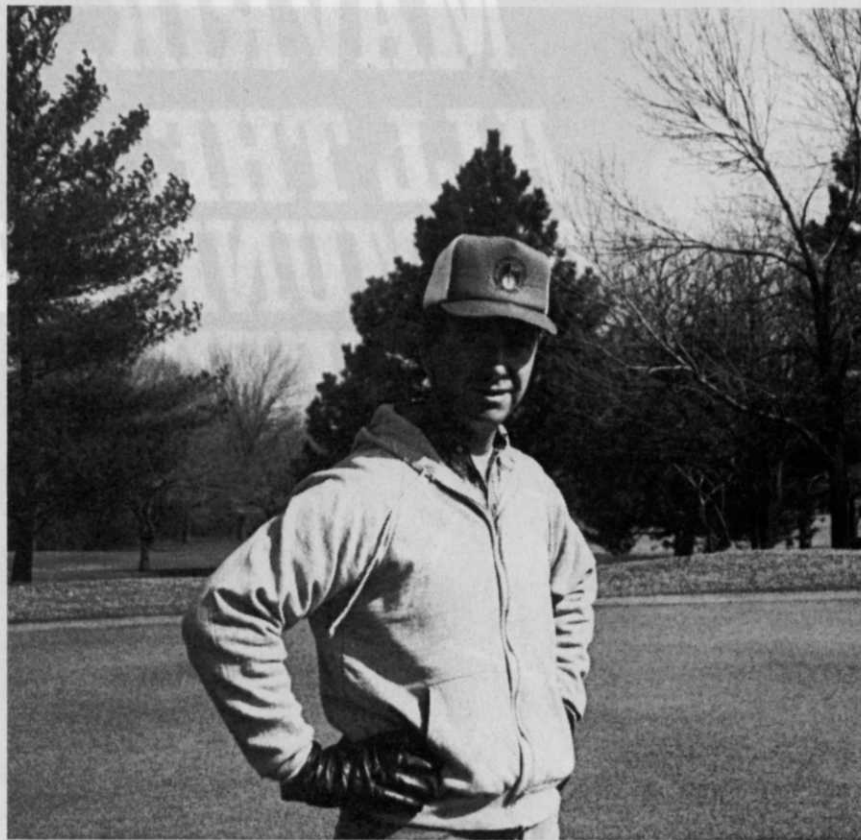
"We were in a situation on the greens where we had C-15 decline and we didn't have much choice in the matter. We had to go in and renovate," Chal-

ifoux says. "What weren't problems with C-15 were problems with predominantly poa annua greens which were getting very difficult to maintain."

All the greens were stripped, the soil loosened and fumigated, and then overseeded with Pennncross creeping bentgrass. Applications of starter fertilizer, hydromulching and irrigation followed.

The greens have come up nicely, but not without a few headaches. "On the negative side of doing these projects is that the membership is generally looking for something instant," he says.

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In three years, superintendent Brian Chalifoux has done a remarkable job in renovating both courses at Olympia Fields Country Club.

"Your grass is covered and you've got a good stand of turfgrass but they don't understand that it's going to take a minimum of three years for the Penncross to mature. We've had a few problems where the heavy play and heavier soils on our greens were slowing this process."

However, most of the North course grasses have come in—but not without some problems, of course. "The failures we had last year were mainly related to shade," Chalifoux explains. "Two of the greens were on poorly drained and heavier type soils. And one of them was 3,500 sq. ft. You're looking at a green that just couldn't handle that much play." (The two courses handle about 50,000 rounds annually.)

"We're still going to have problems growing grass (on the No. 4 green). I think we can do it with some changes in management. Everything is going to have to be right."

The fourth green on the North course was not reconstructed though Chalifoux admits it probably should have been. Instead they have tried to help it in other ways such as pruning trees and actually removing four or five oaks from its vicinity.

Oak pruning is, by and large, contracted out. A thousand have been done so far, but, Chalifoux says, that

hasn't even made a dent toward doing all of them. "We're hoping to get up in about the 50 percent sun range throughout the day," he notes. Along with reducing the shade on affected greens, management practices have been changed to prevent compaction. "The other thing is strictly hand-cutting in these areas: greens, collars and approaches with 22-inch Jacobsen mowers."

Also, the mowing, aerifying and top dressing patterns have been changed. "It's strictly straight runs turning off the greens for both aerifying and top dressing."

Questions and answers

The biggest question facing Chalifoux when he closed the North course in August, 1984, was whether the course would be ready for play in the spring of 1985. "(Course management) wasn't sure that this project could be completed because we were doing so much," he remembers. "They were questioning whether or not we could get the golf course opened back up again the following spring—which was legitimate because I wasn't even sure myself."

The answer was yes, but with a bit of luck. Chalifoux figured he would need to have seed down by Sept. 1 to give the

course a fighting chance. The problem was not getting the course prepped for seeding. It was buying seed.

Bentgrass was in short supply, so he had to scramble to get the last 2,000 lbs. of Penneagle for the fairways. (He used 4,000 lbs. of Penneagle for fairways, 500 lbs. of Penncross for tees and greens.)

Everything seemed to be going his way, too. The weather held and extended the growing season well into December. On top of that, spring came early and mildly, and after excellent growth in April, the North course opened May 18, 1985, about two weeks ahead of his schedule.

Going south

Renovation on the South course is not as extensive as on the North. "I don't think we're in a situation on the South course where we have forced improvements," Chalifoux explains. "The North was in a situation where it was forced improvements."

One of his major concerns has been bringing the bentgrass ratio up to overtake the poa. In conjunction with overseeding of the aggressive bent, he has been experimenting with Cutless and Scott's TGR to chemically control the poa.

"With the low percentage of poa on the South fairways, we're going to be taking somewhat of a chance applying chemicals before fairways are totally closed in, he explains. "If we suppress the poa at this time, the bent is going to be that much more aggressive and our percentages are going to go higher a lot faster."

He and his staff also renovated seven bunkers last fall and plan to continue this year. The program calls for improved drainage, re-grading and re-sodding around the edges.

They've also finished upgrading cart paths on the North course and have begun on the South course. Some needed repaving and all needed widening, to at least eight feet.

With fairway and green renovation on the South course for the most part complete, the tees remained. Many were mostly poa. "We were having trouble growing grass on them," Chalifoux recalls. "Switching over to the bent, we're able to keep them much drier, and the golfers aren't tearing them up near what they used to."

"They're nice firm tees now. The members call them 'hard tees,' but the wear and tear is much less. It's worked out well.

"This is our turning year here. This will be our third year on the new grass and I think we're pretty much out of the dark now and we should have excellent conditions this year." **LM**