

STRICTLY GOLF



Superintendent Bill Black is proud of the way his crews handled heavy rain last summer, not to mention the stone bridge, shown here, they built themselves.

Congressional C.C. goes to great lengths to handle heavy rain

■ An extremely wet summer was not conducive to maintaining golf courses in the East and Midwest last year. It meant that superintendents had to go that extra mile to provide playable conditions. That was much the case at the prestigious Congressional Country Club, where U.S. senators and congressmen, and business leaders, are among 1,700 playing members.

"Last season started out as a super summer because there wasn't any humidity," notes superintendent Bill Black, who's been at Congressional for 13 years. "But it turned out to be an extremely wet and humid summer."

When conditions are wet for any length of time, certain problems are sure to pop up, as they did at the Congressional:

● "Cutting to almost 1/8th of an inch can have an effect on golf courses," notes Black. "We end up having certain diseases and algae." He uses Fore, Manzate and Dithane, along with heavier doses of Daconil. "They don't control the diseases, but they check it," he says.

A disease-related problem particular to the Congressional was drainage. Sand bunkers became black-layered because of all the moisture, which plugged up drainage. So Black's crews had to dig up all the sand and clear the drains.

● "There are days you have to restrict golf cars, too," Black further notes. "We didn't allow golf cars over Labor Day Weekend. It's not something we like to do, but the members are generally

pretty considerate."

● Bunker washouts are the most difficult problem to deal with. "Fridays, the bunkers are in great condition and you're ready for the weekend," he says, "and then a big storm hits on Friday night. It's impossible to get them back in shape."

He noted that workers once spent 50 man-hours on a Saturday pushing sand back up into the bunkers, "and you couldn't tell we did anything."

Despite summer's rains, Black and his crews kept Congressional Country Club's ryegrass and bermudagrass fairways and Pennlinks greens the envy of area golfers. It has been the site of seven Kemper Opens and will host the 1995 U.S. Senior Open and 1997 U.S. Open. It is also (former) Vice President Dan Quayle's home course.

Black, a Penn State University gradu-



Overcast weather and a light drizzle, typical of last summer's weather, doesn't keep crews from mowing the Congressional's greens.

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ate, has been on golf courses virtually his whole life. As a five-year-old boy, his backyard and playground was Hershey (Pa.) Country Club. He was superintendent at Fountainhead Country Club in Hagerstown, Pa., for 13 years before coming to Congressional. He has easily adapt-

ed to his current surroundings.

"We have 500 acres I can roam around on," he says. "It's difficult to hide in your own world any more as a golf course superintendent, anyway.

"The exposure I have with a different cross-section of people is something I

value very much. In a normal job, you don't get to meet doctors, lawyers and senators.

"You get a nice, crisp day when the sky is blue, the grass is green...there's nothing like it."

—Jerry Roche

Management practices, not turf species, are key at this 'course of a different texture'

'Zoysia...a good grass for both high and low handicappers...has a kind of bounce to it,' says Dick Stuntz.

■ What might work for one golf course superintendent might not work for another. Likewise, what might work for maintaining one type of turfgrass might not work for another.

Alvamar Country Club in Lawrence, Kansas, is perhaps the prime example of this golf course truism. There, superintendent Dick Stuntz maintains zoysiagrass fairways and Cohansy bentgrass greens, two highly unusual grasses for this part of mid-America.

Yet, using state-of-the-art management practices, Stuntz has shaped Alvamar's 18 country club holes into one of the finest and most-honored courses in the nation.

"Alvamar has had zoysia fairways and tees since its inception in 1968," notes Stuntz, "so it was a major concern to change the grasses I was tending when I came here in 1983." He credits his zoysia education to Roger Knoll, the superintendent at Old Warson in St. Louis. "I took a zoysia lesson from him," Stuntz says. "It took some time and work."

The most difficult aspect of having zoysia is not its maintenance but its establishment—from sprigs, not seed or sod. Yet the positives—at least here, 30 miles west of Kansas City—far outweigh the negatives.

"Zoysia has a kind of bounce to it," Stuntz says, ticking off a number of favorable characteristics. "Its dormant play is much better than bermudagrass. It's got a golden dormant color. It's a good grass for both high and low handicap players because it's coarser and the ball sits right



Dick Stuntz likes the look and feel of zoysiagrass tees and fairways, and Cohansy bentgrass greens. The golf ball easily sits upright on the zoysia (right).



up on top of it."

Cohansy is, Stuntz says, "a very sensitive bentgrass." It is finer-bladed and more upright, and it has a more consistent texture than Pennncross, the accepted industry standard, Stuntz observes. Though Cohansy is highly pythium-tolerant, pesticides mixed from emulsifiable concentrates (ECs) will damage it, he continues.

The zoysia fairways and tees are mowed at 7/16ths of an inch. The Cohansy bentgrass greens are mowed at 6/64ths of an inch to provide stimpmeter readings approaching 10, even for the Kansas Open, which has been played at Alvamar since 1975.

"The demand for faster greens has made our profession more of a profession," Stuntz says. "It's all relative, but the expectation of the golfer from 1967 until today is like two different ballgames. If this course were maintained like courses of the early to middle 1970s, I'd get run out of town."

He blames televised golf tournaments and the advent of the stimpmeter, which can quantitatively measure green speed, for golfers wanting faster green speeds.

This demand has necessitated lower cutting heights, which in turn causes an increase in *Poa annua* infestation. Stuntz's answer to poa encroachment might be applications of Scott's TGR, a turfgrass growth regulator that has shown in university tests to affect poa.

"But Cohansy is very sensitive, and Scott's TGR is touchy stuff," the veteran superintendent notes. "So I'm going to be right there when we do the mixing and applications."

The Alvamar complex (which also features an 18-hole public course with another 18 holes on the drawing board) maintains a three-acre Cohansy nursery.

Owner/president Bob Billings, who played basketball at the University of Kansas with Wilt Chamberlain, keeps communication lines open—out of necessity. One of the country club's members is David Robinson of the NBA's San Antonio Spurs, who owns a home along one fairway. He and other basketball stars, like Chicago's Michael Jordan, play some of the 30,000 rounds at Alvamar each season. And the adjacent public course plays host

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