

[GOLF/GROUNDS]

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'Golf & the environment' debate

The effects of the blistering summer of 1995 are making spring turf repair difficult, but being outdoors is a welcome change from a brutal winter!

Rick Grote of Terrace Park Country Club in Milford, Ohio, had started to bring the course back from last summer's heat when I called in mid-March.

Northerners usually breathe easier by mid-August, thinking the worst of the hot weather is behind them, but Grote said that last summer taught him and others to never let down their guard—even after August 15th!

"Soil temperatures were so high in summer that we had a bad seed catch," he said. "And then, in October, the cold hit overnight, which reduced turf repair time. We're hoping it warms up quick. We've been spiking and seeding, but we have to hold off on the pre-emergence herbicides that will keep seed from germinating."

Wayne Lemanski of Indian Lake Hills Golf

Course in Niles, Mich., had been busy tuning up equipment when we spoke.

"We're working on some equipment, waiting for our weather to break," he said. Lemanski's now using rotary mowers in the golf course rough areas. "The turf blades stand up better with rotary mowers," he said. "The rotaries are easier to maintain; there's some bearing, wheel and blade maintenance, but it's easier than reel mower maintenance."

With all the talk today about finding good employees, Lemanski said it's important to "keep your help happy" by finding ways around worker complacency. One simple solution: he shifts job duties around to give the individual crew person some job variety and well-rounded experience.

"Everything's ready to go; now we're waiting

for the course to green up," reported James Cochran, of Piper's Mill Golf Course, located in Eureka, Mo.

Cochran sounds like a superintendent who knows his job, does it well, and doesn't put much stock in fancy-schmancy ways to attract golfers to the course beyond...a good golf course!

"We have a good course here, and the price is right," he said. "There are too many courses out there," trying to make a go of it, and their managers try anything to bring in the golfers.

Special rates for seniors? he asks. "They're the ones with all the money!"

"Two for the price of one? You're giving away your golf, and not running a very good ship!"

Cochran's philosophy on employee relations is basic. "The American worker wants to know two things: how much he's getting paid and what his benefits are. The superintendent [job applicant] also wants to know if he gets a pick-up truck.

"I want superintendents who are out on the course cutting greens, not driving around. I want people who care about the golf course."

Cochran enjoys working the course, and that's good. There's lot's of golf ahead! **LM**

Cabin fever subsides as supers ready for spring



Terry McIver

TERRY McIVER
Managing Editor

Bent fairways from *Poa annua* are working at Westwood

by JERRY ROCHE / Editor-in-Chief

Walter Montross of Westwood Country Club in Vienna, Va. undertook the herculean task of converting 95 percent *Poa annua* fairways to Pennlinks bentgrass in 1990. The key to the program's success was simply ceasing management of the fairways and letting the poa die out, and then giving Mother Nature some help.

"We encouraged the poa to re-emerge," Montross remembers, "and then blew it away with Roundup.

"It was a radical change. Our fairways had been 95 percent poa for the past 15 years. Many of us in the Mid-Atlantic area are concerned about overseeding bermudagrass with rye, but the deciding factor

was length of dormancy in this area."

Not too many years ago, bentgrass might not have been a viable choice for fairways in the transition zone. But with improvements in mowing techniques, pesticides and irrigation, it seemed right.

"It doesn't cost a penny more to maintain bentgrass rather than rye," Montross observes, "but you have to watch traffic under droughty conditions, and there's no overseeding."

The entire project cost \$39,000: \$7500 for irrigation modification, \$3500 for drainage tile, \$15,000 for seed, \$6,000 for renovation chemicals, \$7000 for Bayleton and Subdue fungicides.

"I never thought I had a choice," the veteran superintendent says. "When I was hired, I was given a mandate for change. We talked about doing it little by little, but I said let's bite the bullet and do the whole thing at once.

"I had confidence that I could do it, but I also had a tremendous amount of support from my old college professor Doug Hawes, the University of Maryland, Virginia Tech, the USGA, the people at Burning Tree and other superintendents.

"The process itself was seat-of-the-pants. In a way I was very naive because I didn't anticipate the problems that two inches of thatch could cause."

Westwood's number 18. 'It doesn't cost a penny more to maintain bentgrass rather than rye,' says Walter Montross.





Die, poa, die

The course closed one day (Aug. 30th), during which Roundup non-selective herbicide was sprayed. Renovation began on Sept. 7th when the fairways were aerated three and four times with a Toro fairway aerator.

During the renovation, the fairways were closed, and golfers had two options: hit from the tees, and play the following shots from the rough to complete the hole. The second—and most popular option—was to play shorter-cut roughs as “par 3” holes.

Before seeding, Scott’s Starter Fertilizer (19-5-26) was applied to the fairways.

“Then we cross-seeded with Pennlinks+Nutricote, two pounds of treated seed per 1000 square feet,” Montross remembers. “We used a tennis court roller to roll them.”

“We did a decent sales job,” Montross remembers, “but a lot of the membership was leery. Four days after seeding, we saw seedling emergence, and that brought an audible sigh of relief from the club.”

The fairways were rolled on the 12th day. (“Members thought we were cutting the grass.”) Country Club 18-3-12 fertilizer was applied three times.

On the 18th day after seeding, “the poa started to out-compete the bent where the

bent was thin, but crown damage on the young turf was the most frustrating thing I went through,” Montross says.

Mowing began on the 22nd day after seeding with a Toro 223D modified five-plex. “Once mowing was initiated, the turf started performing well,” he notes.

Maintenance crews had to take extra care with divots—which were “extensively topdressed”—the rest of the fall. The course reopened Oct. 14th with the Virginia state high school championship, and cart restrictions were lifted in mid-November.

“We were like a ghost town for 40 days, then everybody wanted to play,” Montross remembers.

A sunny epilogue

Since renovating, Montross has “sort of used everything under the sun,” including Dimension, Embark, Scott’s TGR, Primo, Cutless, Betasan and pre- and post-emergence crabgrass herbicides.

“We’ve been on a Prograss program, full bore, since 1994, and that’s what we’ll continue on,” Montross observes.

The fairways are now 80 percent bentgrass and 20 percent *Poa annua*. They are mowed at ½ inch, and thatch has been reduced to ½ inch through extensive core aeration.

Montross, who became a GCSAA-certified superintendent in 1984, cautions

The fairways at Westwood Country Club are now 80 percent bentgrass and 20 percent *Poa annua*.

other superintendents who may be considering total fairway renovations.

“Many people jump into these programs and don’t realize the potential loss of revenue,” he says. “We estimated 35 percent loss of play, but it was 90 percent—\$60,000 total over the 40 days we were closed. Some of that we did recoup when we opened the course back up.”

Today, Montross looks back on the experience as “the highlight of my career. Success begets success, so we’ve been fortunate to be able to do a lot of other fun things since then.

“After last year’s fiasco with gray leaf spot destroying the rye,” Montross concludes, “a lot more superintendents around here are looking at bentgrass as a viable alternative.”

Montross is a 1975 graduate of the University of Maryland. He’s been president of the Greater Washington GCSA and the Mid-Atlantic Association of Golf Course Superintendents, and he served as a director of the Virginia Turfgrass Council for three years. He was superintendent at Springfield Golf and Country Club before going to Westwood. □

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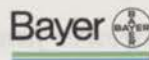
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Circle No. 106 on Reader Inquiry Card

The day Sarge saved Milwaukee's field from seagulls

Grounds manager Dave Mellor 'went to the dogs' to save his Milwaukee County Stadium turf. Brewer fans applauded the effort.

When seagulls threatened major league baseball in Milwaukee, David Mellor and his grounds crew solved the problem with well-trained dogs.

Mellor is grounds manager at Milwaukee County Stadium, home of the Brewers. To his knowledge, this is the only time dogs have saved baseball. And, not just a single game, but two weeks of baseball by the American League Brewers.

Mellor told *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT* magazine about an incident after reading our January article about the growing popularity of using dogs to chase geese off golf courses and other fine turf areas.

The problem began after a June 1993 concert by former Beatle Paul McCartney at the stadium. Warm temperatures and persistent rains during the week of the concert prompted hordes of cutworm moths in trees surrounding the stadium to hatch.

Stadium lights drew the moths to the ballpark.

Mellor says that as he and his crew deep-tine aerated the field at the conclusion of the concert, just before midnight with the stadium lights turned off, he saw moths landing on the turf.

Because the Brewers hosted the New York Yankees the following night, he and the crew returned the following sunrise.

"I saw a couple of seagulls on the field. They ate a few moths, and flew away. We didn't think anything about it," recalls Mellor.

But an hour later the gulls returned; they brought friends—maybe 600. By mid-afternoon, after feeding, they left the field. But, an hour before sundown, they returned. This time as the Brewers and Yankees played.

"We thought, 'Oh, No!'. By the fifth inning we had several hundred seagulls on the field again," says Mellor. "The birds wouldn't leave. The ball would be lined within two feet of them and they'd take off a little bit and land right back down.

"The Yankees were complaining; they wanted to protest the game, and the umpires were asking, 'What can we do about this?'"

They managed to complete the game, but there were more to play on consecutive nights. And, shortly after sunrise the following day, the gulls were back—more than 800—estimates Mellor.

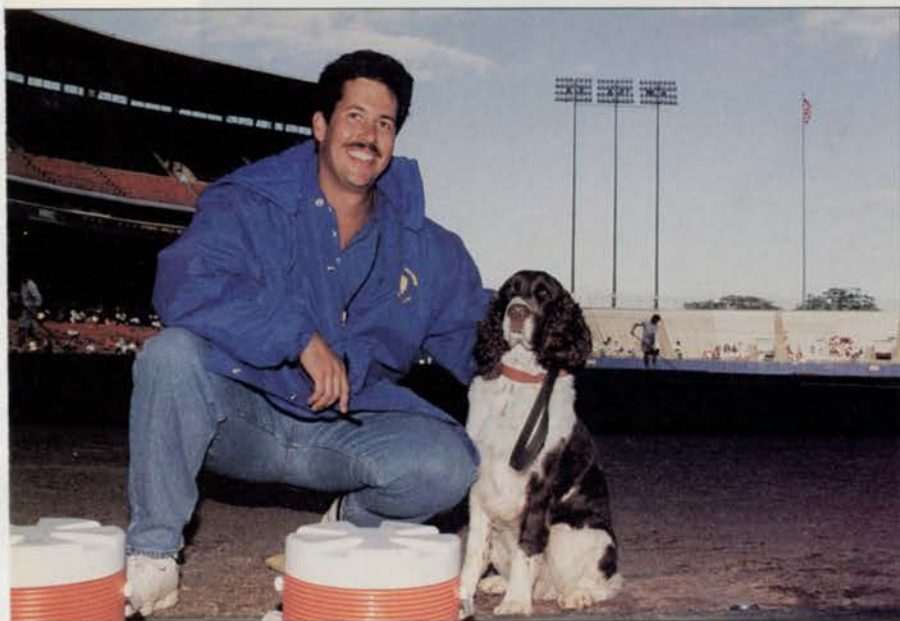
"They were just kind of walking around making a big mess," he says. "They had already eaten most of the moths but they were used to coming there, and we couldn't scare them away."

They had developed a landing habit pattern, believes Mellor, a pattern that had to be broken.

The Department of Natural Resources suggested loud noises and, indeed, the crew had some success

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Dave Mellor with Sarge, the Springer Spaniel that saved Milwaukee's turf from a horde of seagulls.



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The foundation of good disease management.





Milwaukee County Stadium ground crew kept shovels and buckets handy for dog emergencies.

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using bottle rockets which they shot out of starter pistols. Also the bomb squad of the Milwaukee County Police set off several detonations.

But Mellor knew he couldn't keep up this barrage during a game. Harming the gulls was out of the question, too. They're protected by the Migratory Bird Act.

Finally, Mellor called his wife's boss, a member of the Wisconsin Waterfowl As-

The Yankees were complaining. The umpires didn't know what to do, says Mellor.

sociation. The hunter suggested well-trained dogs.

Immediately, the call for dogs went out. In fact, the grounds crew held impromptu auditions that very day, and found some likely candidates.

"The dog had to be able to run out onto the field, chase the birds so they would fly up into the air, and come right back to the owner in time so we didn't delay the game.

"There are only 120 seconds between the last pitch of one half-inning and the first pitch of another," says Mellor.

That night, and for the remaining

games of the extended home stand, Mellor and his crew sat one dog in the stands near the right field foul pole and another near the left field foul pole. Then, as the inning ended, or there was a pitching change, the dogs raced onto the field and harassed the gulls.

"The dogs were having a great time. It was like playing for them," says Mellor.

The handlers would call the dogs back at exactly 90 seconds. Not once did the dogs create a problem, in fact the fans loved them. Some of the ball players offered to buy several of them.

"One of the best dogs was Sarge, a Springer Spaniel," says Mellor. "His owner could not come to every game so Sarge came home with me at night and came to work with me the next day."

The Milwaukee grounds crew used fireworks and dogs for several weeks, even after the Brewers went on the road, before it finally convinced the gulls to leave the turfgrass for good.

"The dogs saved major league baseball here in Milwaukee for about two weeks," says Mellor, who also credits his boss Gary Vandenberg and assistant Troy Smith who, he says, helped him at every turn. □

