

"The Grass Is Always Greener - - -"



A few of the 165 bunkers at Muirfield. Sod layers are used to build the face of the bunker and must be replaced about every five years.

by **WILLIAM H. BENGUEFIELD**, Western Director, USGA Green Section

Last summer it seemed nearly as many turf-grass specialists returned from Europe as bankers, politicians, relatives, or rich aunts. Amid the roar of jets at Amsterdam's Schipol airport, a returning fellow passenger—upon learning of our journey—remarked, "So you've actually been trying to find where the grass is really greener." "Yes," I answered, then concluded it was in the United States!

This is not to say that Europeans are incapable of growing good grass, nor that greener grass is always best. There is little truth in either statement. But the aged fact remains: traveling, seeing, listening and learning from the other fellow is **always** educational and exciting. It is **always** worthwhile. A few words here on last summer's first International Turfgrass Conference (Harrogate, England) and a view of the United States turf managers international strengths and weakness, in my view, may interest some of our readers.

FROM POUNDS TO KILOS

The speaker was from Switzerland and asked,

"How many kilos of *Poa pratensis* per hectare are sown along roadsides in the U.S.?" (What?) Or Dr. I. Yashikowa from Japan reporting that, "200 cubic centimeters of bensulide per 100 square meters in 10 liters of water will give good *Poa annua* control." Or Bjarne Langvad of Sweden stating that, "sand (.02-4 millimeters) should be added in a layer 15 to 20 centimeters thick."

Yes, the metric system is worldwide and definitely IN. Even the British (inventors of the inch, foot, yard, mile, ounce, pound and ton) have conformed. In fact, the USA and Canada are the last major hold-outs for *avoirdupois* weights and ancient ways of measuring distances. Familiarizing ourselves with and accepting the metric system is really our move— not the rest of the world's. It is such a logical system, particularly in our field of turf management, that we should be ready at last to adjust and accept.

FROM BLUEGRASS TO POA

Then it is also our folly to insist on using



The attendants of the First International Turfgrass Conference held in Harrowgate, England, July, 1969.

common names for all plants rather than scientific names. Wouldn't it be just as easy; wouldn't it be far more professional for us to use *Poa pratensis* when we talk about Kentucky bluegrass and *Agrostis palustris* when referring to Seaside creeping bentgrass? We seem to have no trouble in pronouncing *Poa annua* or *Poa trivialis*! What's wrong with pronouncing *Agrostis tenuis*? The rest of the turfgrass world, from the Dutch scientist to the salesman in a London garden shop uses scientific plant names; why can't we? Would it not be a step toward greater professionalism if, for example, the Golf Course Superintendents Association should advocate such a move? At least it would be a step forward in communication, between ourselves as well as with the rest of the world. It's worth thinking about.

TO THE SCOTTISH LINKS

Few golfers return from Scotland disappointed in the test of golf they have experienced. Scottish courses "play" extremely well. Greens are fast but true. The courses are strategic (Muirfield has 165 sand bunkers) and delightful. Their roughs are unforgettable, but beautiful. And their golfers must be more complacent than ours by the way they accept the more rugged conditions. Richard S. Tufts, past President of the USGA, recently commented, "Golf under the more natural conditions under which it is played on the British link courses, is a far better sport. The overmanicuring of our courses to meet the demands made by our golfers has injured the game. Things have to be too perfect with us,

and the only practical excuse for the maintenance of our roughs in almost fairway condition is the problem of delay in play created by lost balls."

TO THE PLANT BREEDERS

Among the Dutch, Swedish, British, and now Germans, the emphasis in Europe has been on turfgrass breeding. New and outstanding varieties are under development. Ryegrass, fescue and even timothy (discontinued in United States turfgrass use years ago) receives major attention. To a lesser degree, bluegrass (*Poa* species) and the colonial type bents (*Agrostis tenuis*) are also investigated. Indeed, some new varieties of *Agrostis tenuis* appear outstanding under conditions in The Netherlands, and this research might well someday re-establish colonial bents for putting green use in the USA.

Lest anyone conclude that I was brainwashed and now advocate "Growing Grass — European Style," rest assured that this is not the case. While emphasis in Europe has been on turfgrass breeding, management practices have not, perhaps need not, keep pace. The British attitude toward turf management and turf use is different from ours. Where in the United States would you be successful with a seed mixture of 70 per cent red fescue and 30 per cent colonial bentgrass for greens? Where could you succeed with three putting green applications a year of a fertilizer containing ammonium sulfate, iron sulfate, bloodmeal, hoof and horn and superphosphate? Their tees and fairways are never fertilized.



A HUMBLING WORLD

One would simply not survive in the United States with the management practices commonly followed abroad. Our golfers demand quality turf and uniform playing conditions. Our climatic differences dictate a total turf management effort; disease control, weed control, optimum fertility levels, uniform irrigation, soils to resist compaction, etc. The climatic factor and the turf use factor alone takes all the argument out of "Who grows the best turfgrass in the world?" The question is irrelevant.

Suffice to say the turfgrass plant, through good management, can be grown successfully around the world and under a tremendous variety of climatic conditions. It's a marvelous plant! It usually demands good management, and to grow it well, our constant attention. It is the center of a very humbling profession.

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Robert Sommers, Managing Editor