



George Ord inspects the spiker he made for fairways, tees and greens.

The Bentgrass Fairways of Sewickley Heights

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and GEORGE ORD, Superintendent, Sewickley Heights Golf Club

Sewickley Heights Golf Club, Sewickley Pa., is among the most beautifully turfed golf courses in the country, and George W. Ord is the golf course superintendent there. During our Green Section visit last summer, I recorded some of the experiences Ord has had in managing the fairway turf at this Pennncross bentgrass covered course:

Ord: The original planting of Sewickley Heights Golf Club consisted of 7 per cent Pennncross, 73 per cent Highland Colonial bent, 7 per cent Seaside bent and 9 per cent redtop on tees and fairways. The greens were seeded with 100 per cent Pennncross. As of now the course is, I would say, almost pure Pennncross

bentgrass. We do have some slight encroachment of *Poa annua* on fairways and roughs, but the bent on the greens is vigorous enough to take care of *Poa annua* invasion.

Griffin: What have you been using to treat and control *Poa annua* on your fairways?

Ord: We have used the tricalcium arsenate program for *Poa annua* control and it has been very successful. We have used a total of 7½ pounds of actual material on the fairways and will continue with the program on an "as needed" basis in the future.

Griffin: George, on your test areas, haven't you used about 24 pounds of tricalcium material?

Ord: That's right. When we started the program, we wanted to walk into the program slowly. We used our most severely infested spots as test areas, figuring if we did lose them, we weren't losing anything but *Poa annua*. As the test plots proved successful, we went on to a complete fairway program, and now, four years later, I think we have the fairway *Poa* problem well under control. My guess is that only 5 to 10 per cent *Poa annua* remains in the worst areas.

Griffin: On managing Penncross bentgrass fairways today, a lot of people fear its aggressive tendencies and the buildup of thatch. What have you found in this respect?

Ord: Well, the key to this is fertilization. In 1967, we verticut the fairways in the fall. That's the last time we have had to do it, and this is 1973! If you watch your fertilization, you'll not have to do too much verti-cutting. But this is only working at our golf course and I don't know whether it will work at others.

Griffin: Well, I'm glad to hear that some people are afraid of Penncross in the fairways. I think many of them are under the impression that dethatching and sweeping will be necessary at least twice a year to keep thatch under control. But with less nitrogen, you have not found that problem to be serious.

Ord: That's right. We aerify the fairways only once a year, in the fall. As far as fertilization is concerned, we try to stay somewhere in the neighborhood of 2 to 2½ pounds of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year. At present, we're using granular material and broadcasting it at 1/2 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per application. This is done twice in the spring and twice in the fall.

Griffin: And that's strictly a nitrogen and potash fertilizer?

Ord: It's a 28-0-14 material. With very light applications, we have avoided lush growth and I think this is another key factor. We use no phosphorus at all.

Griffin: What is your mowing schedule on fairways?

Ord: We mow Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays. Originally, we crosscut fairways but now we try only to reverse our direction with every other cut. We find crosscutting unnecessary with the big mowers and the design of our course. We feel it is more beneficial to the fairways to make the straight run than try to turn with our big machines. We use 10-bladed reels on 7-gang hydraulic units. Up close and around the greens, we use a light triplex unit,

speeding up the cut by 33-1/3 per cent to simulate the 10-blade fairway reel. This seems to work out very well and we don't have to get in close with the big units.

Griffin: Have you found any special time of the day that you feel is preferable for mowing fairways?

Ord: Yes. I think the ideal time to mow turf is in the evening after the sun has gone down. The turf is dry and you get a much better cut. The only problem is, it takes us five hours to mow 18 fairways. Therefore, we start early in the morning, and by noon, the fairways are done. This leaves a problem of clumped clippings on those fairways cut early in the morning. To alleviate the problem, we go out in the afternoon and drag a hose between two turf trucksters to break up the clumps. It takes about a half-hour because we only have maybe five or six of the early-cut fairways with the clumped clippings.

Griffin: Have you ever tried dragging the fairway with a hose before you mow, rather than after?

Ord: Oh, we do that every morning, seven days a week. We find that getting the fairways dry early not only helps with the mowing, but also considerably reduces our disease problem.

Griffin: Do you have any special advice on watering?

Ord: With Penncross, I think you have to be very limited in the amount of water you apply. You can actually get rid of some of the *Poa* if you slack off on water a little bit and let the bent try to take over.

Griffin: About what pH do you try to maintain in the fairway soils?

Ord: The fairways are between 6.3 and 6.8.

Griffin: A few years ago, I recall that you built a spiker out of parts of other pieces of equipment. Could this possibly help with some of the thatch eradication or control?

Ord: I think it's been a great help, especially on localized dry spots of which we had so many. We tried wetting agents and, though helpful, they didn't solve the problem for us. We went to work and built a 15-foot wide hydraulic spiker and we can go out and spike all the fairways in about four hours.

Griffin: You use this on greens too, don't you?

Ord: Yes, this is used on greens and tees and it takes about 2½ hours to do all of them. During the summer, we do it about every two weeks.

And that's the way George Ord manages his bentgrass fairways at Sewickley Heights.