



Pete Dye inspects turf on the greens at New Orleans Tournament Players Club course. His energy and commitment were the keys to the Ocean Course at Charleston, South Carolina, being the first to test a new hybrid paspalum variety.

New seashore paspalum reigns supreme

THE LONG-awaited release of another hybrid paspalum from the University of Georgia's turfgrass breeding program is underway. It is being done only after extensive field-testing at various sites around the mid and deep southern regions of the United States.

Based on the field data, this grass has a stronger resistance to environmental stress, disease and wear. Further, it seems to be better suited than Sea Isle 2000 for universality of function, performing equally well as a primary rough grass as it does for a fine-textured putting surface. This is pretty much unheard of in the warm-season grass circles and appears to be the best grass yet for dealing with poor water quality situations.

Dr Ron Duncan, who selected and bred this grass when he worked for the

Plugged Lies from America

By **JON SCOTT**

Director of agronomy for the PGA Tour in the United States



University of Georgia breeding program, is extremely excited about its potential. Originally known as Sea Isle 98, it actually was a precursor to Sea Isle 2000, which was released a few years ago.

Problems with getting enough material for breeding stock placed it behind the release of 2000, which is still a very good grass and almost as universal. However, if you want state-of-the-art,

then Sea Isle Supreme – the new name for '98 – is the grass. If it lives up to its name, it may revolutionise our ability to grow quality turfgrass in bad water situations.

We got our first look at this grass just over a year ago at the site of the 2003 World Cup matches at The Ocean Course at Kiawah Island. I may have referred to this story previously, but for the benefit of you Pete Dye fans, it bears a more detailed telling.

The Ocean Course was previously grassed with Tifdwarf bermuda on the greens. As I understand it, paspalum was a thought, but hybrid paspalum was still in the initial stages of testing at the time, and no one knew whether it would work that far north (Charleston, South Carolina).

The only visible success story was at Tim Heirs Collier's Reserve Golf

Club in Naples, Florida, and that was still a very young study at the time.

Unfortunately, there were severe freshwater withdrawal issues (and still are) along the south-east Atlantic Coast, and The Ocean Course was forced to use a series of horizontal well pipes placed among the sand dunes. These would catch the rainwater and channel it into the irrigation lakes. The ingenious Pete Dye invention worked fairly well until a dry summer three years ago that continued into the following year.

The drought forced more reliance on the shallow well system, and the course began to take on higher and higher levels of salt. This was lethal to the Tifdwarf, and it went into the winter of 2002 in a weakened condition. Over-seeding didn't help matters, and by the early spring of 2003 it was apparent that things were not going well for Tifdwarf.

Since the World Cup was to be held that autumn, not to mention the lucrative resort business that would be disrupted by bad greens, there was a sense of urgency to solve the problem. Several agronomists had already ploughed the ground by the time I got involved, and the consensus was that while it looked hopeless, there was still a chance that the Tifdwarf might recover during transition. Subsequently, that proved not to be so, and a meeting was called to discuss options for re-grassing.

When I arrived on site, Ocean Course managers had already decided



Turf grower Phil Jennings and director of agronomy with the US PGA tour Jon Scott inspect the new variety Sea Isle Supreme at the Jennings Turf Farm in Soperton, Georgia, US. The farm has been contracted to grass the Tournament Players Club course at Triviso Bay in Naples, Florida, wall to wall with Sea Isle Supreme.

to press forward with re-grassing using Tifdwarf. Naively, I suggested that we might want to investigate using the new, hybrid paspalum that it was rumored would soon be released, given that the water problems were not likely to go away. I say naively, because it quickly became apparent that there was no way to obtain enough grass for turfing the greens, even if it could be released.

Because the Ocean Course architect, Pete Dye, had remained very involved with this masterpiece since its construction, a phone call was made to Pete to tell him where we were going with the greens re-grassing.

Pete is well beyond what you would call a simple devotee of hybrid paspalum, and once I told him that we had discussed that option he would hear of nothing else. ▶

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◀ He was sure he could talk to Dr Duncan and the university into getting enough grass for the greens. Even if there was no sod, he was convinced that the greens could be sprigged and grown in quickly enough to make the World Cup.

Naturally, my caution lights went from yellow to red, and I made it very clear that I would be comfortable only with the Tifdwarf for the short term. The greens could be easily re-turfed with the bermuda now and then later converted to paspalum in the year following the World Cup. Pete would have none of that, and I quickly found myself watching the whirlwind of energy and positive thinking go to work. In short, I got the hell out of the way before I got run over.

I don't know all the details, but words have come back to the effect that Pete mounted one of the strongest, most effective lobbying campaigns in history to get Sea Isle 98 for the Ocean Course Greens. I've been told that anyone who had decision-making power got calls from Pete, and he was, as usual, very persuasive.

The next thing I knew, he was per-

sonally scheduling visits to Kiawah to supervise the stripping of the green surfaces, modification of a few of the more severe contours, and re-grassing with what is now Sea Isle Supreme sprigs. Anyone that knows Pete is aware of what the word "supervising" means. You can find him with his boots on and a shovel and rake in his hands and plenty of dirt under his fingernails until the job is finished. I swear he can literally will a project to be done on schedule and come out successful. More likely, his genius for seeing forward is so keen that he knows that something can be done when all we can see are the horrors of failure. That word does not exist in his formidable, and sometimes quite salty, vocabulary.

Woe onto the individual that he perceives dragging his feet, and in this case, it was me. Naturally, he did get the grass planted on schedule in one short month from start to finish. Also, quite naturally when it comes to Pete, he got perfect weather with just enough rain to help push the paspalum along. Oh, and did I forget to mention that he somehow convinced the water authorities to provide the

much needed fresh water from the potable water system to grow it in?

As Dr Duncan will tell you, fresh water will establish hybrid paspalum quicker than brackish, though it can be done with the latter if you have time. We had no time. Pete took care of it, just like he does everything else with which he gets involved.

Of course the grow-in went flawlessly and the course opened on schedule 90 days from the start of the project. Given another month to mature for the World Cup, the greens were absolutely perfect for the competition and the players gave them rave reviews.

As if to punctuate this story, the rest of the world, including the next Tournament Players Club to be constructed, would have to wait a year before my lobbying efforts yielded the same results. But then, I'm not Pete Dye. There is only one, and the world will have a hell of a pot bunker to fill when he is gone.

Let's welcome Sea Isle Supreme to the wonderful world of paspalum and celebrate the growth of the game in areas where it would otherwise have been impossible. ●



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