

# Doing it the American Way

## 2004 GCSAA Conference Review



One of the picturesque par 3s at The Bridges at Rancho Santa Fe

**With the 20th Australian Turfgrass Conference just around the corner, AGCSA chief executive Steven Potts, AGCSA president Mark Couchman and AGCSATech manager John Neylan headed an AGCSA delegation to the GCSAA conference in San Diego. Here, John Neylan gives an overview of their week-long fact-finding trip.**

Over the past eight months the AGCSA has been in regular contact with the Golf Course Superintendents' Association of America (GCSAA) to strengthen ties between the two associations.

Following discussions with senior GCSAA staff, including chief executive Steve Mona,



AGCSA chief executive Steven Potts addresses the International Summit

we were invited to attend the 75th GCSAA conference and tradeshow in San Diego.

This afforded Steven Potts, Mark Couchman and myself the opportunity to meet with the GCSAA and to experience the conference and tradeshow.

During the conference week we had the opportunity to meet with key GCSAA staff members including Steve Mona, chief operating officer Julian Arredondo and Hannes Combest, director of membership and professional development.

It was most interesting to note that while the GCSAA is obviously a much larger organisation, the issues affecting both organisations and golf course superintendents in general are very similar. As a result of meetings with the GCSAA it is hoped that we will be able to share resources and to benefit from the education and research programmes that the GCSAA has in place.

### INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT

As part of the conference week, an International Summit involving golf course superintendent associations from around the world was held. The summit provided a forum to discuss global issues affecting golf turf maintenance and how the respective associations can work together to tackle these issues for the benefit of association members.

Nations represented at the summit included Australia, America, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Slovenia, The Netherlands and Sweden while there were representatives from Asia and the Federation of European Golf Greenkeepers' Association (FEGGA).

The meeting included an update from all nations on their current situation and some background information regarding their various associations. This highlighted the similarities of all associations and strengthened the belief that by addressing some issues from a global perspective we can benefit the professional lives of all of our members.

Some of the major issues identified during the summit included the general public's lack of awareness regarding the environmental management advancements which have occurred in golf course management, a standardised global education pathway and enhancing the recognition of golf course management globally.

The meeting determined to form a working group to move forward on several of the issues identified and report back to the next summit which will be held in England in January 2005.

### GCSAA CONFERENCE SEMINARS

During the conference several seminars were attended including:

#### **Bentgrass Rootzone Management in a Transitional Environment.**

This was a highly informative and detailed seminar that examined the environmental factors affecting root growth and the cultural practices required to maintain maximum root mass during summer conditions.

#### **The Management of Seashore Paspalum.**

This eight hour seminar provided a very detailed examination of the characteristics, uses and maintenance of seashore paspalum. It was particularly useful given the increasing interest in this grass species in Australia. This grass is a niche grass that under the correct management will produce a very high quality playing surface.

Seminar instructor Dr. Ronny Duncan, who incidentally will be a keynote speaker at this

year's 20th Australian Turfgrass Conference in June, emphasised the particular maintenance requirements of this grass, which is quite different to other warm-season grasses. He particularly emphasised that while this grass has incredible salt tolerance, as the water quality becomes more saline greater efforts have to be put into soil conditioning, soil amendment and leaching.

#### **Best Management Practises for Irrigating Turf.**

This full day seminar was part of a three-tier program that provided participants with the skills to produce a water management plan. Most developed countries including Australia, USA and Europe have developed water management strategies for the future. Golf courses, being water users and as an obvious part of larger catchments, must demonstrate best management practices and that water is being used efficiently.

#### **GCSAA TRADESHOW**

The tradeshow was huge and certainly took up a lot of the floor space. All the main turf product suppliers were present as well as a

myriad of the smaller industry product suppliers and distributors.

At the most basic level the products are the same as what is available in Australia, however, the difference is that there are more manufacturers and variations on a common theme.

#### **SEMINAR FIELD TRIPS**

As part of the field trip seminars, two golf courses, Del Mar racetrack and the new San Diego Baseball Stadium were visited. This provided a spectrum of conditions under which southern California turf is managed and some of the challenges that are faced.

#### **Fairbanks Ranch Country Club**

The Fairbanks Ranch Country Club was established in 1984 on the site of the Olympic equestrian venue and is close to the coast just south of San Diego. The golf course is in a valley that creates a relatively mild but dry (about 250mm rainfall a year) climate with maximum temperatures rarely exceeding 27°C. Because the golf course is low-lying it is also subjected to frosts and has experienced 22 this year.

The original 18 holes feature *Poa annua* greens, non-overseeded seashore paspalum fairways and overseeded seashore paspalum roughs. A new nine-hole golf course scheduled to open in March/April 2004 features creeping bentgrass greens, Tifway II fairways and bluegrass/tall fescue roughs and surrounds. The expectation is that the greens will be allowed to revert to *Poa annua*.

The irrigation water is of high salinity with 1800-1900 mg/l total salts. This water is used on fairways with potable water on the greens. Because of the salts, this course was one of the earlier adopters of seashore paspalum (variety Excalibar).



The Fairbanks Ranch Country Club was one of the earlier adopters of seashore paspalum

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Originally it was overseeded with ryegrass because of its strong dormancy, however, over the past three years this has not occurred and *Poa annua* and bentgrass have been allowed to come in during winter. The *Poa annua* and bentgrass transition out once irrigation commences due to the salinity.

Because "Excalibar" is sensitive to herbicides, alternative grass species were explored for the new course by trialling couchgrass and other seashore paspalum varieties. Tifway II was selected because it exhibited as good a salt tolerance as the paspalums, had better winter colour, quicker spring green up and was less sensitive to herbicides.

The greens were presenting a high quality playing surface with Primo and Proxy used to provide a tight surface with good seedhead control. Primo is used monthly depending on the weather conditions (under high stress conditions it is not used)

To assist in the control of sodium, gypsum injection is used with about 25-30 tons/year used over the golf course. Winter rainfall is necessary for the leaching of salts.

## The Bridges at Rancho Santa Fe

This course was designed by the Robert Trent Jones II Group and is a 6400 metre, par 71 course that plays host to the internationally televised Battle of the Bridges Tournament.

The course is set on about 230 hectares consisting of deep canyons, streams and wild but beautiful terrain. There are 200 housing allotments with a membership of 200-250.



Groundstaff go to extraordinary lengths to repair pitch marks at The Bridges



Zoysia bunker face at The Bridges

There are 20,000 rounds of golf a year with the course closed on Mondays.

The greens are Penn-G6, fairways are non-overseeded Tifton 419, and the tees are Tifton 328 overseeded with *Poa trivialis*. The bunker faces have been sodded with zoysiagrass to reduce couchgrass encroachment.

One of the features of the greens is the extraordinary effort put into the repair of pitch marks. As with many of the new bentgrasses, the Penn-G6 is slow to grow in when damaged. Therefore, 40 hours a week is put into repairing pitch marks by removing a 25mm diameter turf plug and replacing it from the edge of the green.

## Del Mar racetrack

The racetrack was built in 1937 through the efforts of Hollywood legends Bing Crosby and Pat O'Brien. The track is close to the ocean and constructed on fill with kikuyu as the predominant turf species with a high proportion of couchgrass throughout.

The turf is irrigated with recycled waste water that has high salinity and sodicity. On a variable soil profile, with an irrigation system that has poor distribution uniformity, the leaching of salts is a constant challenge.

In fact the salinity of the water has adversely affected the kikuyu and encouraged a high proportion of couchgrass. The inside 4-5 metres of the track have been sodded with GN-1 couchgrass as a result of the water quality.

The racing program is from July to September with six race-days a week and 2-3 races per day on the turf track.

## San Diego Baseball Stadium

At the time of our inspection, the final touches were being made to this new baseball stadium which is the home pitch of the San Diego Padres. It is typical of modern stadia with the emphasis on providing excellent viewing so that spectators are close to the action. The stadium has a seating capacity of 42,000.

The construction of the field involved the incorporation of an historical building into the stands and moving a second heritage-listed building. It cost \$US3 million dollars to move this building and is the largest brick structure ever moved in one piece (it was moved about 50 metres). It was moved to allow for the construction of a public baseball facility.

The playing surface is a USGA profile and was sodded with couchgrass and overseeded with ryegrass. As with most modern stadiums, shade is an ever present issue and this is overcome in part with the use of moveable grow lights.

The field has 81 games a season that also involves up to five hours practise per game. Home games are usually played in six game blocks. The key issues in preparing both the turf and the dirt surfaces are;

- Safety.
- Playability: consistency is very important.
- Keeping the game on; in-field (dirt) areas must be covered in the lead up to games to protect against rain. To lose a game will cost the club around \$US2 million.
- Aesthetics: must look good. 🏆



The USGA spec turf at the recently constructed San Diego Baseball Stadium