

Grasses at the Country Club of Havana

By Frederick Snare

The crossing of the Gulf of Mexico from the United States should be an interesting experience to any traveller—it is, sometimes, to the poor sailor. Here there is a distinctly noticeable change in architecture, people, language, customs, climate, and soil, and conditions generally are quite different. I have noticed, however, that despite these considerable variations from the temperate zone, the golf microbe works just the same in the tropics as elsewhere, encouraged perhaps by the geniality of the climate and the character of the game.

In the development of golf links in Cuba we have been greatly helped by the natural conditions. It has been necessary for us only to discover the grasses obtainable in Cuba which will give the best results, because the years of study and development of grasses in the temperate zone with their fixed conclusions help us but little. We can not grow the fine grasses of the temperate zone successfully in Cuba, nor can cane sugar be produced in the North as it is here.

In Cuba, previously to 1912, there were no links, and very few people in Cuba who knew the game, so that it has been a unique experience to be a pioneer in the development of golf links in a tropical foreign country, consequently quite free from tradition or experience to guide in the important matter of suitable grasses, and incidentally to have practically no scientific knowledge to suggest or guide in that work.

The Country Club of Havana has built links on what was practically a deserted farm land or private estate in the suburbs of Havana, covered at the time of selection with *manigua*, which is a dense growth of tropical brush, so dense in fact that it took two weeks of the time of an ex-greenkeeper of the Englewood Golf Links to cover the 130 acres and make a report as to its possibilities. I recall also taking an hour to make my way through the length, before it was cleared, of what is now a 325-yard hole. This report indicated at least that the soil was rich; one-half of it was alluvial deposit from a stream which flows through the property. What convinced me of the possibilities was not only the character of the soil but a cropped patch of *herba fina*, or Bermuda grass, growing under a tree on the property; and knowing the prolific growth of this grass in Cuba I imagined we would have no difficulty in producing a good fairway and perhaps reasonable greens.

This was twelve years ago and before we had much knowledge of what is now called "vegetative planting." Our information as to that method of planting came from Jamaica from a former English resident of Cuba, but it differed in the respect that they chopped the Bermuda grass and mixed it with wet soil and spread the mush on the area to be developed, and, as far as I know, they probably still adhere to that system of planting of greens, lawns, and the like; but we varied it by a dry mixture soaked on the spot. We used the vegetative system in planting the fairways, but experience has shown that if we had simply cleared the land and been patient the Bermuda in time would have appeared just the same. It is astounding how fast it travels in the favorable season. One hole we did not plant at all. In clearing it we found an old Mauser shell in which the Bermuda had taken root, sprouted, and grown so dense that it required quite an effort to dig it out. With the exception of this one hole we planted all the fairways in Bermuda. To-day there is practically none of it visible;

but we have something better. On our rich alluvial soil, in the river bottom particularly, we were troubled in the dry season with considerable cracking of the fairway.

It is for the experts to say why; but the fact is, that in about six years nature had supplanted this Bermuda with an entirely different product, namely, *cana maza* (mat cane), or what Dr. Piper tells us is Bahia grass. Resulting from this grass, the soil is protected, as the grass really does form a mat. Cracks are little in evidence, lies are perfect, and we pay no attention to divots, as they naturally fill up quickly themselves.

As to the putting greens, we planted a nursery of all the known Northern grasses. These flourished for a moment only. In the nursery we tried Italian rye grass, and have also several times since. It failed. Bermuda became our sole reliance. In a very few months after planting we had greens—thin, fast, wiry, dry—far from ideal. We experimented with various top-dressings, and finally discovered that the refuse of tanneries sifted made an excellent dressing, and we still use that when necessary. We found a real soaking of the greens to be necessary to soften the texture of the grass. So with varying experience we came two years ago to the discovery of a new grass. Dr. Piper states in the November BULLETIN that the grass which he named on his visit to Havana as Acapulco was not reported by the botanists who explored Cuba previously to 1906, and that it therefore is an introduced grass, being indigenous to Acapulco, Mexico. As the sample with which we first experimented came from Belot, across the harbor of Havana from the city on a peninsula occupied by the West Indies Oil Company, which company has vessels plying between Mexico and Cuba, it is possible that the grass arrived in Cuba by that route.

Bermuda in Cuba is hardy. It grows on cinder, sand, and stony soil, but it is not perfect on putting greens at all seasons of the year; and of course we play golf in Cuba twelve months of the year. There are six months of dry weather with only occasional rains, and the other six (May to December) are the rainy season, during which there are torrential downpours. These rains are hard on Bermuda greens; the grass does not grow dense, the greens wash out, and we have had to do considerable top-dressing. Also the rainy season retards the Bermuda, or rather encourages a weedy grass; and during the months of September, October, and November our greens are at their worst.

On the arrival of the winter dry season, the Bermuda takes a fresh start and the weedy grass gradually disappears, when with sprinkling and top-dressings the greens are quite good. Bermuda is fine for several years after a fresh planting, but in our experience after that time it becomes coarse and weeds appear. Another objection to the Bermuda is the wiry nature. The greens must be cut just right. If the grass is too long, accurate putting is interfered with.

The Bermuda in Cuba takes an enormous amount of water. The greens for good putting must be soft, and noticeably so, underfoot, so that in the dry season between the effect of the dry trade-winds and daily sun we need to use as much as 40,000 gallons of water on the greens in 24 hours.

One of our members observed this Acapulco growing at Belot, brought a patch about six inches square to the Club, and had it planted on the clock golf in the corner. This was about seven years ago, and it has spread out over an area of about eight feet square, and it was the result of that experiment which induced us to introduce it on the greens.

We were building a new green two years ago and meanwhile found

the same grass growing a few miles away on the boundaries of Colon cemetery. We gathered and planted from that source, and have had the green constantly in use these two years.

These are the points about the grass: it grows dense and forms a close mat; the tropical rains do not affect it; it does not require much water; worm casts are less in evidence; it responds to ammonium sulfate as well as does Bermuda; it need not be cut close for good putting; it must not be cut close enough to expose the runners; although cut long, it makes a faster green than does Bermuda; there is no wiry condition to overcome; it is not a pretty grass, but turns a brownish cast for a day or two after cutting; it is too strong for the weeds at any season; it even crowds out the Bermuda.

We figure from observation that by inserting 100 square feet of Acapulco sod in distributed patches over any average green of 5,000 square feet, the natural spread will, in three years' time or less, give us Acapulco over the entire green.

We have just completed a promising job which may be of interest. The line of play on seven of our holes crosses a stream. While the stream is not over 10 feet in width and does not have a considerable flow of water, yet the loss of balls and the recovery of them from this stream have been the cause of great annoyance. Torrential downpours and enormous swelling of this stream have barred any mechanical devices which we could conceive which would not be carried away by the floods. But we have done this: at the crossings of the stream we have filled up the pools and other depressions, producing a continuous level about a foot below the normal water-level, with mixed clay and brush filling; this we have topped off or riprapped by a hand-placed and tamped stone layer, resulting from which we now have a rippling stream about six inches deep, and balls are visible and quickly recovered. This work has not been terribly expensive.

Some U. S. Golf Association Decisions on the Rules of Golf

In a handicap golf match held over our course, the rules for the match called for elimination play with reparings each day until the field of players was reduced to five participants. These five participants were then to play a round-robin for the finals, on handicap basis. During the round-robin play several of the matches tied. It was then necessary to determine what course should be pursued in determining the winner of the round-robin play. No local rule has been made before the match started to cover the method of deciding ties. We could find no specific United States Golf Association rule covering the method of deciding tie match when play is on handicap basis, and it was accordingly decided by the committee in charge of the match and the participants who had tied, to play another round on the same handicap basis as applied to the round which was tied. Please advise us what our procedure should have been, and give the national rule covering the method of deciding tie rounds on handicap basis and how handicap should apply.

(Decision) Your question is one which arises continually. We have always decided that handicap tie matches should be played over again. We consider that your local committee took the proper action.

A question has arisen in our district regarding handicaps. We are handicapped in accordance with the Calkins system, using our five best cards to obtain the average scores, subtracting the average from par, and