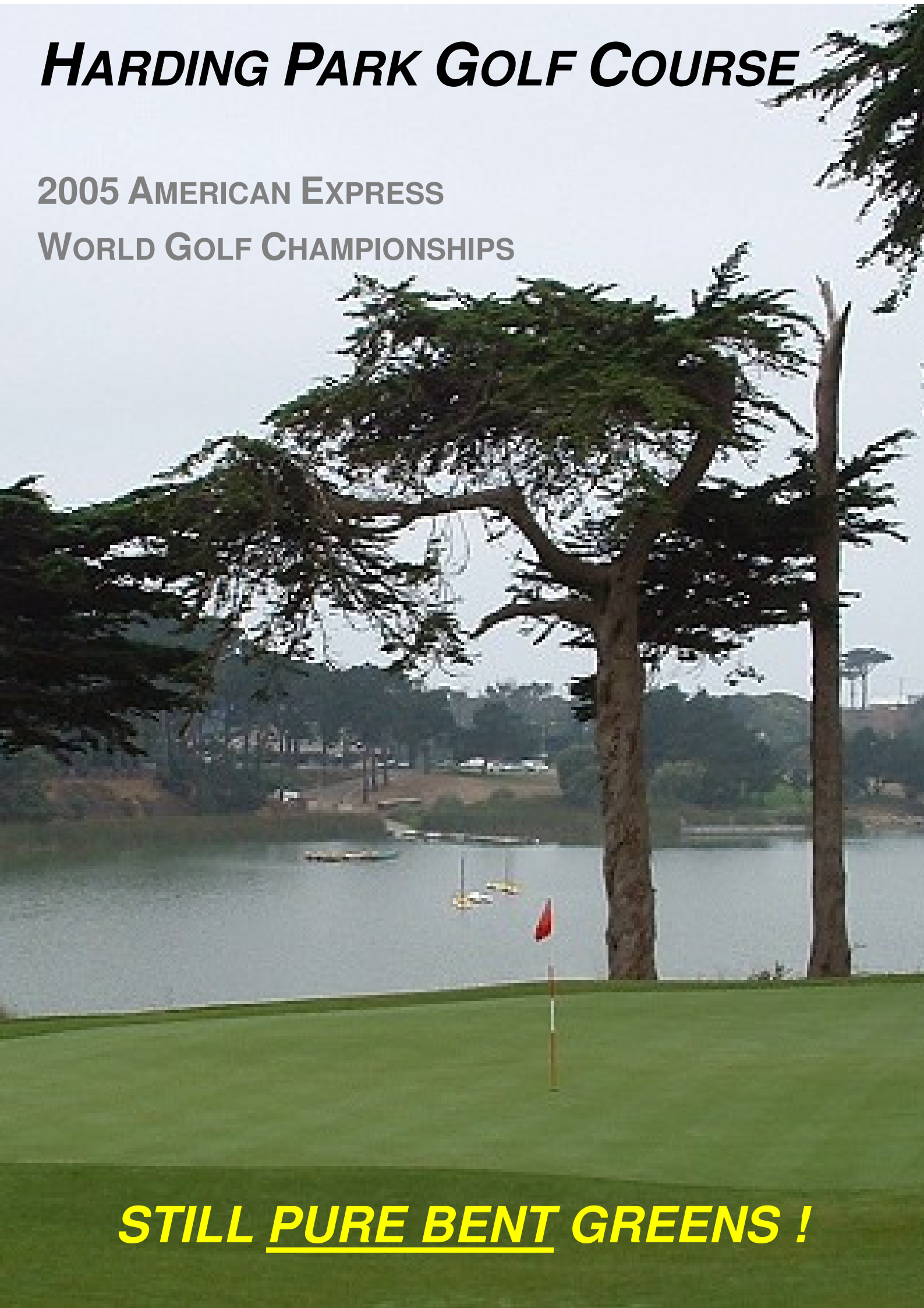
HARDING PARK GOLF COURSE

2005 AMERICAN EXPRESS WORLD GOLF CHAMPIONSHIPS



STILL PURE BENT GREENS !

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letters to the editor

Keeping *Poa annua* out

I read Kevin Ross' article "Analyzing a nemesis" (page 40 in the March issue). I completely agree with the gist of his greens management program. It works. During the 1970s, I employed the same approach at Pasatiempo in Santa Cruz, Calif. where I saw increased populations of bent, and most recently I've directed a similar program being used by the city staff at the newly renovated Harding Park Golf Course in San Francisco.

In the case of the latter, the greens at Harding remain 100-percent pure bent grass after more than two years since establishment. I credit Roy Goss, Ph.D., of Washington State University in the 1960s and '70s for laying the program foundation. Goss was a genius who manipulated a subtle, natural weakness in *Poa annua* as a pest-control mechanism. He advocated spoon feeding nitrogen in foliar sprays with high levels of iron (bents naturally have a slightly higher tolerance of high iron levels than *Poa annua*). Here's the approach I advocate, which is in lock step with what Mr. Ross wrote:

* Frequent, light foliar applications of nitrogen with chelated iron – Dr. Goss used iron sulfate. A synergistic plant uptake is enhanced by the combination as well;

* Light, frequent sand topdressing (dusting) - the work of John Madison, Ph.D., at UC Davis and the efforts of Jack Butler, Ph.D., at Colorado State in the 1960s;

* Light, frequent overseeding with selected bent varietals - always use two to avoid monoculture populations for natural diversity pest protection;

* A solid regime of cultural practices as required to physically manage root profile, salts, percolation, etc., (coring, sanding, light vertical mowing);

* The key is irrigation management - keep the fingers off the water button to encourage deep rooting. Cycle wetting and drying, deep watering like nature;

* Keep phosphorus levels at a bare minimum (near starvation levels) to discourage seed head (flowering) production of Poa annua;

* Keep pH in a range of 5.5 to 6.2 using a rotation of basistic and acidifying soluble fertilizer (i.e., calcium nitrate and potassium nitrate for basistic, ammonium sulphate and urea for acidic). I give Jon Scott, vice president of Championship Agronomy for the PGA Tour, credit for the aspect of pressing to keep pH low; and

* Daily hunting (scouting) to hand pick Poa annua out of greens (by cup changer - only takes two to five minutes per green).

In two years at Harding Park, with the Dominant X-treme blend of varietals Providence and SR1119, we've been 100-percent effective keeping Poa annua out *without costly pesticides*. Additionally, we have seen little pest activity, have spot sprayed a minor outbreak of Necrotic ring spot about 15 months ago and only had to apply Heritage fungicide once last fall for a beginning manifestation of take-all patch.

Today in coastal California it is even more critical to convert *Poa annua* greens to bent grass, as bents are nearly completely immune to the *Anguina pacificae* nematode pest that is devastating courses along the coast.

Jim Prusa

Director of Agronomy

Harding Park Golf Course / KemperSports / PGA Tour American Express Championship

San Francisco