

BYE BYE RYE

563

Red clover in Minkhorst Stadium upset

by Trevor Walton

PERENNIAL RYEGRASS — that stalwart of NZ pasture production — is slumped groggily in its corner, saved by the bell after only one round in the Fight of The Century.

Meanwhile in the broadleaf corner, G27 Red clover is chatting light-heartedly with team-mate Puna chicory who came second only to G27 in the broadleaf play-off. As he talks, the first round winner does a small skip — the scent of victory has clearly gone to his head.

The crowd is abuzz. Groups of Waikato deer farmers who bankrolled the fight are talking excitedly with their fellows, while hundreds of farmers from other parts of the country push at the stadium gates, trying to catch a glimpse of the action.

Referee, DSIR scientist Warren Hunt, is conferring with the Ryegrass team manager and while the fight looks to be a foregone conclusion, they agree that it's too early to come to a final decision. Someone makes a remark about the Hare and the Tortoise and it's agreed — the fight should be allowed to run its full course.

Rye is an old campaigner and should not be allowed to fold after only one round. He's known for his stamina and there's a chance that the new boy, Red Clover, may not be able to keep up the pace.

Fight convener, DSIR Grasslands boss John Lancashire, claims the fight is a world first.

"No-one knows how well different species perform when grazed by deer. It's time to sort the whole thing out.

"It's crazy for farmers to be talking of implanting deer to fit the growth pattern of Ryegrass/White Clover, when all that's needed is better pasture species.

"Ryegrass and white clover have been a powerful combination for years, but in my view they're over-rated. It's been just like the news media and the way they push men's sport. Two years ago you wouldn't have known that NZ women were the world's top netballers. . .

"Well it's the same in pastures. Ryegrass and clover have captured the media eye: The good summer



Lancashire's hotch-potch

Competitor plots at the Joe Minkhorst stadium looking weary after a trial run last winter

performers just haven't had a look in."

Lancashire says he has been keeping an eye on the slopes for the last few years and has a good eye for form.

To prove it one way or another, Lancashire has organised a set of national trials, widely billed as the pasture Fight of The Century. Eager Waikato punters have so far put up \$7,000 of the \$70,000 fight cost.

Fight rules involve a herd of deer being set loose on a field made up of 16 competitor teams. The team that gets eaten first wins.

Fight location is the Joe Minkhorst Stadium, a flat paddock at Wardville, Waikato. Teams were established in the paddock about a year ago.

Before round one began in February, the deer herd had two trial runs to get the feel of the pitch. To add excitement to the match, the 16 7-metre square competitor plots were replicated four times, but in a different sequence each time.

"When the whistle goes, the deer really get into it," says Hunt. "They run excitedly around the paddock to get their bearings, then once they've worked out which species is which, they really hog in — if you'll pardon the pun. Boy, those deer may not know much about science, but they certainly know what they like."

Warren Hunt tells TDF that Red Clover was the clear winner in

Round One, with Puna Chicory coming in a close second. The grasses were all also-rans.

But grass team spokeswoman Lola Peren says the battle is far from over. Red Clover and chicory always do best in the summer, she says, because of their continental background.

"They're hot blooded and will try anything with the deer. We're British and more steady — you'll see what I mean when winter sets in.

"Last winter I was checking out some of the broadleaves for form and most of them had gone to Surfers to get away from the cold."

Peren also questioned the absence of Fallow and Wapiti in the fight, accusing the convener of favouritism. "Lancashire knows we get on well with that lot and they're not even in the fight."

But Lancashire brushes off the accusations. "This is just the first round of the first fight. I fully accept that the grass team may perform better in the winter and that different species and classes of deer may have different dietary preferences. The results in Waikato may not apply in Southland, either.

"That's why the judge is not giving out any scores after round one and why we're after the NZ deer farmers for more money. With sport like this, everyone should be taking part." □