Courses, supers withered by drought

By MARK LESLIE

There are 100-year floods and 100-year droughts. For some, this was a 100-year summer. It was dire enough in Florida and Ohio. There was record-crunching heat and humidity in Pennsylvania. Dew points went through the roof in Minnesota. Everywhere from Delaware to the Midwest, golf courses got scorched.

“The only guys happy are west of the Rockies,” said Golf Course Superintendent Association of America President Gary Grigg after a meeting of chapter representatives in Lawrence, Kan. “It’s been drought in the Northeast, heat in the Midwest, rain in the South. [Director] Paul McGinnis said Arizona had a stretch of 47 days when the temperature was over 110 degrees.” “This was the worst summer I’ve ever seen for growing grass,” said Terry Buchen of Double Eagle Club in Galena, Ohio. “We had so much rain, and the heat and humidity was the worst I’ve ever seen. The grass just cooked.”

Cooked so badly that many golf courses closed down so crews could aerate and reseed. People were hitting balls off bare soil at some facilities.

“If you had new greens with sand-based construction, generally you were fine,” said Stan Zontek, director of the U.S. Golf Association Green Section (USGA) Mid-Atlantic Region.

Alumni key university development strategy

By MARK LESLIE

COLUMBIA, S.C. — In the Southeastern Conference (SEC), 75,000 to 100,000 fans pack football stadiums every Saturday in the fall. Now a unique concept in golf development, The University Club, aims to pack them in at new golf courses located at those same SEC schools.

Indeed, The University Club at University of South Carolina (USC) boasted a whopping 12,000-plus members when it opened its first 18 holes here on Sept. 15. A second University Club — this one at Louisiana State University — could register similar numbers when it opens in a year or so.

Targeting universities with “a fervent athletic supporter base,” this new company, called The University Club, decided to concentrate first on the Southeastern Conference which leads the nation in attendance at football games, said ASNY President Ron Dodson. “But we want superintendents to consider conservation as a mechanism to save money. Generally, our program should be thought of not only as environmental but as cost-efficient as well.”

The ASNY is one of several major associations that have agreed on a dual membership strategy. GCSAA and local chapter representatives appear to concentrate first on the Midwest, golf courses located at those SEC schools.

continued on page 46
The 100-year summer strikes

Continued from page 1

"If you had bentgrass greens, you were basically fine. But if you had poa annua greens, it's been a real problem. And, in certain places, you were in trouble with ryegrass on the fairways because of a disease called Pyricularia grisea (gray leaf spot) found normally in Bermudagrass and centipedes. This year ryegrass got it from the Mid-Atlantic to Kentucky. I've seen this disease twice on ryegrass in 24 years.

"Putting these ingredients all together and you have some hurting golf courses. All have suffered... There weren't many uniformly the golf courses were hurt.

Bob Brame of the USGA North-Central Region agreed. "It was so bad... Greens, green embankments, fairways — there are scars everywhere," he said. "A number of clubs are closing and there are major problems — aggressive overseeding and some sodding — and using temporary putting surfaces while renovating their permanent greens."

"We're having a very tough year because there's no way to treat it. It happens when soil can't drain, and it kills the grass quicker than anything. Usually you see very little of it, never to the extent we've seen it this year."

"We've been here two years and we've had a 50-year ice storm and now a 50-year drought," lamented superintendent Dan Pierson of Wilmington (Del.) Country Club. "We're looking at more financial loss this year for two years it will help," he said. "If we were ever going to do the restoration. I have no viable roughs now."

At Chester Valley Golf Club in Malvern, Pa., superintendent Kirby Putt closed the course from Aug. 28 to Sept. 16 "to try to re-establish some of the greens where the poa annua was left."

At Merion Golf Club in Ardmore, Pa., superintendent Paul B. Latshaw took advantage of the disaster to do a project he had planned for later in the year. "Looking at three or four poa annua-dominated greens that had lost 30 to 40 percent of their turf, he closed the course to install a new irrigation system.

"This made the most sense," Latshaw said. "If we were ever going to do the fogigation, the timing was perfect."

Putt and Latshaw blamed heat and humidity rather than the drought for the turf loss at their clubs. Putt added another culprit: an untimely drenching (3-1/2 inches of rain that flooded most of the course on July 21) and the fact he could not get the moisture out of his greens.

Latshaw added the fact that "we got hit with every disease poa annua can get — from anthracnose to summer patch, root Pythium, everything. We had so many peratures at one point above 100 degrees. It was absolutely brutal."

"In many places across the country, the weather elements were savage. For instance, by mid-September:

* In Delaware, "water police" were checking neighborhoods ensuring that people held to water restrictions put in place beginning Sept. 1. "There was very understanding and reasonable," said Dan Pierson of Wilmington (Del.) Country Club, who had feared the worst. "Courses are limited to watering between 5 and 8 a.m., greens and tees only. But we can use the automated irrigation systems for delivery."

Delaware surpassed the 50-year drought stage and noted that the worst drought was in 1991. "We were 7 inches above normal rainfall in mid-May," Pierson said, "and now we're 12-1/2 inches under."

* Philadelphia marked nearly 50 days exceeding 90 degrees, including a record 27 in a row. "We have broken every record in Philly," said Paul B. Latshaw of Merion Golf Club. "Of the last five years, four have been the hottest in the history of Philadelphia. This year was the hottest and the worst drought on the record books.

* August was the driest month on record in many parts of Pennsylvania.

* Data from 1985 to 1995 shows Minnesotta had the hottest August in the last ten years, the hottest July since 1979 and the hottest June since 1981.

* Just 7/10 of an inch of rain was measured from the first of June to mid-September at Waterville (Maine) Country Club. "Business is great. The golf club has had it," said superintendent Kyle Evans.

* We had 15 consecutive days where we set record highs for heat and humidity," said Kirby Putt of Chester Valley Golf Club in Malvern, Pa. "It's the fourth worst drought in 101 years."

* Columbus, Ohio, is 12 inches over normal in rainfall — normal being 36 inches.

Scenes like this were numerous across the country. Excessive heat and humidity, combined with drought, made it unusually difficult to grow in this new course.

Poinciana Golf Club in Naples.

"The mole crickets, sod web worms and other insects really relish the moisture — as do nutsedge and other weeds," he said. "And we can't get out to spray for them. It's like a sponge."

The fairways at Worthington Golf Country Club in Bonita Springs, Fla., were under water for more than three weeks in mid-September, said superintendent Kevin Selsor. "We're losing 2 inches a day, vertically, and we're looking at two to three weeks before all the water is drained off. That is, if we don't get another storm.

"We have a lot of major problems. We still have live roots and green leaf tissue. But with another two to three weeks to go, we just don't know what we'll be facing. Temperatures are in the 90s and the water is warm. That depletes the oxygen from water and suffocates the grass."

Putt said that although he was able to syringe the greens to cool them off during the day, since he couldn't relieve the moisture inside the greens, the stage was set for fungus. In his case it was basal stem root rot, an offshoot of anthracnose for which there is no good chemical control. "You can stop it by using higher rates of Cleary 3336. But if you stay in high heat and humidity as long as we did, we found that no chemical could help," he said.

In the case of gray leaf spot, Zontek said superintendents had a mere three-day window in which to apply Daconil. "If you did, you got good results. But if you didn't, it was pretty dramatic in how much you lost.

"Exactly how are superintendents overcoming the problems?"

Even Pierson's good intentions worked against him. Having begun a project to convert to bentgrass fairways, he had just aerified on July 26 and overseeded using KR1029 and Penncross bentgrass.

"It's not a bentgrass conversion but a re-establishment," Putt said. "We wanted to take full advantage of when poa was at its weakest point."

Short of rebuilding, he plans to deep-drill to 10 inches and fill. "If we do that twice a year for two years it will help," he said.

Latshaw reseeded with a bentgrass blend of Providence, Crenshaw, L93, Southshore and a little Penlinks. "It will be survival of the fittest," he said. "We have some greens shaded, some in full sun, some that don't drain well..."

**Brutal conditions across the country**

For your nearest Distributor, call, PRECISION TOOL PRODUCTS CO. 1-800-253-2112 or fax 333-429-3985

-- Ask for a free demonstration! --

---Turf Solutions---

**PROBLEM:** You like to overseed with Annual, but need something darker & finer?

**SOLUTION:**

Developed especially for winter overseeding!

Froghair is a product of: