

Fall-prep, spring-recovery lessons learned from winter kill of '95-96

By MARK LESLIE

"If only..." Anxious words heard often in the North Central United States this spring as second-guessers count lost grass and revenue on the back side of a nasty few months. At the same time superintendents, greens committees and course owners have learned lessons that will help in the winters and springs to come.

Lessons concerning preparations entering winter, and lessons about recovering from

those sometimes deadly few months.

Monday morning quarterbackbacks are saying, "If we had only..."

"The clubs that bit the bullet and decided to seed greens or sod green banks and renovate their fairways over the years have come out on top," said Bruce Williams of Bob O'Link Golf Club in Highland Park, Ill. "A lot of clubs don't care for the disruption of regrassing fairways or green and tee banks,

etc., every six or seven years. And many times they have to pay the price when the weather throws a curve."

Members at Saginaw (Mich.) Country Club, where Jerry Faubel is superintendent, are breathing a sigh of relief. They acted on drainage problems before the winter of 1995-96.

"Making underground improvements on an old golf course is so difficult because the board doesn't want to spend the money on that," Faubel said. "But when

they understand what is involved and the results of good drainage, well..."

Lessons abound for superintendents regardless of whether they made renovations or not.

FALL PREPARATIONS

Everywhere, greens covers played a pivotal role in saving turfgrass.

Also, "Paramount in this part of the country, is to aerify right after Labor Day so the holes are healed in and not open to the winter," said Rick Tegtmeier of

Elmcrest Country Club in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. "If golf courses were aerified in late-September or October, they had some desiccation. But if they aerified in September and they were healed in, they were fine."

"We top dressed our greens with silica sand at the end of November," added Dennis Watters at Fort Dodge (Iowa) Country Club. "That helps protect the crown area."

SPRING RECOVERY

A lesson learned in returning turf to health: "If you have a water wagon, you'd better use it," Watters said.

"The key was, if you had your irrigation on early and were checking the texture of the grass. If the grass blade was brittle, you needed to water. We charged our system up the first week of April and that still wasn't soon enough. For the most part, getting water on as soon as I did saved me, but I have spots that are pretty tough."

Indeed, Tegtmeier attributed part of his success to beginning his watering regime in early March.

Watters also recommended spiking and solid-tine aerifying the greens, then adding starter fertilizer early on in the spring. "I put micronutrients on the worst greens," he said.

Dick Stuntz at Alvamar Country Club in Lawrence, Kan., said that for superintendents losing the normally hardy zoysiagrass, little helps.

"You can give them a little more nitrogen," he said, "but it's very difficult to get zoysia to recover more quickly. It has one pace — and that's slow."

UMo scientists: More N equals less zoysia root mass

University of Missouri researchers have discovered that increasing the level of nitrogen fertilization causes a decrease in zoysiagrass root mass.

Reporting in the Heart of America Golf Course Superintendents Association (HAGCSA) newsletter, UMo's John Dunn said: "This response has been well established for cool-season species, but was never before demonstrated with a warm-season species."

Another study found that clippings left on turf tend to suppress dollar spot but may enhance brown patch. "Ours is one of the first reports of the effect of clipping disposal on disease incidence in turfgrass," Dunn wrote.

to stand on wheels.

