April is so cruel, and other random notes

When you live up north this is the cruellest time of year. We're on the shoulder up here, taking a long walk on a 50-degree Sunday then fighting to keep your car on the road on a blustery Monday. The snow is just about gone and a brownish covering is becoming visible through the trees at my local 18. You peer through the maze in hopes of seeing the superintendent's utility vehicle making the rounds. Nothing.

On Saturdays and Sundays they're feeding us third and final round coverage of the fresh PGA Tour season. Knowing that we're at least three weeks away from dropping a ball in the queue makes the Tour, at this stage in the game, almost unwatchable. I turn the channel to hockey. April is too cruel.

I wish I could get away from Fairways '99 in Munich last month, but to be perfectly honest, there wasn't much breaking news rattling around the halls this year. Last year, of course, all the chatter focused on the Asian market and its inevitable halt. Most projects remain on hold while a precious few get underway. GCN will have a full Asian report ready to go next month.

In the meantime, the European market appears to be cruising along at a steady pace. It's funny how the top European issue continues to parallel one of the hottest issues in the U.S. — affordable, accessible golf. While Europe has nothing in place like The First Tee program just yet, talk was bandied about on how to establish such an industrywide initiative. Perhaps we'll drop a couple First Tee stories in our next international edition to push them along.

Golf has an identity problem in Europe, but that could change if the industry begins to reach for a broad market outside of the tourist and existing wealthy. • Toro has been doing it for close to five years, now John Deere has launched its JD ProConditioned line of golf and turf products. The company's first formal program to help put turf equipment rolling out of a lease back on the golf course (page 61). It seems the perfect time to get on the used equipment bandwagon, especially with the increasing number of additions under construction.

A program like this, however, demands full distributor cooperation, according to Toro's Jim Heina, the company's aftermarket business manager. "Our business opportunity has been through distribution, whether it's refurbishing or repair," he said. "We're spending resources to help our distribution channel improve their offering to the end user."

If distribution is the key, I can't imagine that Deere will have much trouble getting the new program off the ground. • Managing Editor Mark Leslie isn't too keen on his new photo (cast your eyes to the right). I think it captures Mark perfectly. Let him know what you think about our new venture into realism.

A heapin' helpin' of Canadian hospitality

So you haven't tasted Canadian camaraderie and hospitality, eh? Haven't sampled that country's version of turfgrass conference, networking and banqueting, eh?

American superintendents, especially those along the Northern tier of The States, might want to check out future Canadian International Turfgrass Conference and Shows.

Much smaller and briefer than the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's 17,000-attendee event, the Canadian show nonetheless packs a lot of information into three days of sessions. And when attendees aren't learning, they're having fun with one another — and life in general.

Thanking my hosts, particularly Canadian Golf Superintendents Association (CGSA) Executive Director Vince Gillis, I brought a brief sampling from Toronto:

• Superintendent of the Year Bob Heron on the difference between golf course maintenance in Canada and the United States: "Southern superintendents like to tease us about working six months a year. We tease them that it's a tough job to kill Bermudagrass."

Any comparison, he said, must be budget-based. "Compare private to private course and public to public and there is not a lot of difference. The grasses are different. But in terms of grooming, the good courses are all groomed properly."

While Southerners have "their set of problems with insects and mold, and really high humidity," he said, "we start preparing for winter back in May — fertilization, fertility, draining the irrigation system, starting from scratch every spring."

• Toronto Board of Trade superintendent Gordon Wittwezen on his longtime friend, Heron: "Bob and I have one thing in common: 'For awhile we both had hairpieces...""

"He seems to have overcome an affliction which he had early in his career — which is to throw golf clubs."

• Superintendent Matt Fadden of Chateau Whistler Golf Course in British Columbia. "In BC grass can grow anywhere. You can grow it on the side of your car."

• Superintendent and former CGSAA President Gary Grigg on courtesies: "A number of superintendents have lost their jobs because of how a crew member treated a member or guest... Courteously respond quickly to requests from guests, members and others."

• Dean Filler, new president of the CGSAA, from Cordova Bay in Victoria, B.C., on priorities: "We tend to make the golf course our top priority. But, the most important thing we manage is people."

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