



In Bounds

By Jack MacKenzie, CGCS
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It is never too early to reflect upon a golf season. With all of its challenges, 2003 appears to be one that will be chalked up as a success. On a frosty morning such as this, I am able to think about the lessons learned through managing a golf course during another atypical year.

Perhaps my most brilliant moment was the concept and use of an electrically operated 215 mile per hour leaf blower to keep my VFD irrigation control panel functional when both internal cooling fans went out during the tail end of the drought. Of course the issue reared itself on a Saturday morning when electrical engineers are both elusive and very, very expensive! The problem to overcome involved creating a powerful stream of airflow over the heat dispersion fins inside and behind the control panel.

Regular household fans didn't cut it and, although effective temporarily, a gas operated blower just wasn't consistent enough for overnight use. Not to mention the death trap created by the CO2 buildup inside my pump house. Thus for under 60 dollars I was able to obtain a directional super powered electric leaf blower/ control panel cooler. Ironic, however, that my pump house is slated for demolition the first of November and my course is replacing pumps used when it was opened in the early 1950's.

My chemical program can also be claimed as a template for future years. The fungicide motto will be, "start early, spray often and use light applications". This year the fairway plant protectant program included a variety of chemistries sprayed on two week intervals beginning the third week of May, the greens and tee program commenced the last week of April. I cannot say enough about the phosphorus acid products. This program limited my exposure to almost all externally caused damage with the exception of ball marks, divots, bug repellent over spray and of course, knees and toes and knees and toes and palms!

To reduce Poa mortality upon the fairways during the heat of the day, a "five plus five to stay alive" attitude was maintained. Evening irrigation was limited to under ten minutes

per station. And once daytime temperatures achieved Poa damaging levels, we implemented a late morning/early afternoon, five-minute shot of moisture upon the fairways. My assistant was able to time the short irrigation cycles behind the last morning group and ahead of the first afternoon group. This program is a carryover from experiments we did last year. We also include par three tee boxes for the recovery of divots.

Speaking of divots, every blemish upon my tees and fairways was seeded late, late last fall and I was surprised by the quick recovery I saw early on in the spring. I plan to incorporate this post-growth seeding program onto my greens after I aerify late this month.

...But Not All Moments Were Spectacular This Summer

The early season was plagued with hydraulic leaks. You know, the kind that occur inside the protective cover shroud and can't be seen, except of course when you turn around for your next pass. In one case I must commend the quick thinking operator who pulled onto a cart path to wrap a towel around the leak and slow the flow. I sort of wish he had brought the unit in after that, rather than mow some more!

And can you say irrigation challenges? Between the holes we created last fall while deep tining our greens and collars, the pipe that shattered when firing up the system while still frozen and the failure of multiple "T"s, my staff and I were kept in high heaven laying pipe.

And finally, my frustration got the best of me one fine morning watching my lads apply fertilizer to the new first cut sod. The direction included double downing at half rates for a total of two pounds of N per thousand. The instruction also mentioned putting down a full rate once over the "apron" portion of the new first cut, again for a total of two pounds of N per 1,000 square feet.

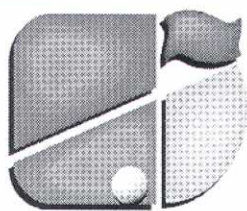
Somewhere along the line the communication broke down and a double application of product was applied for a total of four pounds of N per thousand on the first cut apron. This event happened on the 11th of June and I thought we would be witnessing massive turf mortality during the predicted warm spell. In a fit of anger I attempted to vent my frustration by clashing the aluminum cup I had in my left hand with the aluminum cup setter in my right hand, making a loud noise and thus release my tension.

The only loud noise heard during those few moments was generated by my mouth after I miscalculated the point of contact

and proceeded to destroy the tip of my left thumb and thumbnail! At that time I uttered words unheard by my ears since leaving my position at the White Bear Yacht Club twenty years ago.

And talk about a waste of energy. We soon discovered that the touted slow release product was indeed sloooow release. Not a blemish could be found, but boy did we cut some grass!

In closing, it was a good year. My staff kept me on my toes, the weather forecasters were consistently wrong and the grass grew in spite of what I did. - JM



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