

On Board: Q & A with a member of your BOD

An amazing and early spring...a blessing or a curse for golf courses?
Dave Kazmierczak CGCS, Superintendent at Prestwick Golf Club



The early spring of 2012 will be both a blessing and a curse for us at Prestwick Golf Club. We typically do not get a flood of play early spring and this one is no exception. We also tend to open later than most public courses, so we do not see an overabundance of revenue in a situation like this year. If the weather holds out, and it continues to be above average after the Masters, we then tend to see a real spike in play. (continued on page 20)

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On Board: **continued.**

However, in a conversation I had with our head pro, he stated that the real benefit of an early, warm start to the year is not necessarily up front. He indicated that studies have proved out that a good initial start sets the tone for the entire year. That is what we are all hoping for. We will need it because of the downside of a prolonged season.

The first of which is rather obvious—more time in the field means an expansion of expenses. These expenses were not counted on when the budget was made in early December. Degree-day modeling aside, I estimate we are anywhere from four to six weeks ahead of pace. That means four to six weeks extra of mowing and general care if the season concludes at the normal time in the fall. That means more labor time, more mower care time, more fertilizer and a few more pesticide applications. I am roughly estimating an extra \$18,000 to \$23,000 to our expense ledger, and that estimate is on the conservative side.

That is fine and dandy if we are full and making solid money while we are open, but as I stated, we probably are not. If the weather is in the 50's and there is any forecast for rain, Prestwick resembles a ghost town. One or two nice days gets the grass growing, but won't fill the tee sheet consistently. That, coupled with the fact that every public golfer is bargain hunting at this time of the year, leaves mid to high end public courses left out of the early season revenue bonanza.

For the private course superintendent, it has to be even worse. There is no extra revenue realized for an early season. If they are lucky, they do not have to open early but there still has to be extra expenses for maintenance. It can't be avoided. I would encourage every superintendent to have a good conversation with whoever oversees their finances and alert

them to the reality that this season may cost more than any previous season, and especially the private side guys.

The next thing to address is the wear and tear on the course. This is where the high-volume public guys are going to feel the most pain in my opinion. The added rounds in the early season when the turf is not growing at full capacity will cause eyebrows to raise come June and July when there simply isn't enough tee space to handle the play. Greens will feel the pressure too, along with fairways and rough that will have taken maybe three, to as much as five or six thousand extra rounds of punishment. Once again, full disclosure to whatever supervisors or co-workers early on may be able to curb some unwanted questions and accusations later on this season.

Lastly, for the Prestwick maintenance crew anyway, is how to cope with the lack of labor. We rely on a mix of college kids, high school kids and retirees to get us through the season, with two "full-time seasonal" guys to help us in the shoulder months. It usually works out just fine as right about the time we need extra mowers, laborers, etc. the college kids are getting out and are hungry for work. (Well, hungry for money, really, but I digress.) Not this year. We will need them second week of April and they will be a month out. I guess I will have to get used to doing grunt work along with the rest of my staff a little longer this year. I could try to find a few temporary guys to fill in the month but that doesn't seem likely, and by the time we would have them trained in, I would have a labor issue of too many guys.

On the positive side, I like to think we will be ahead of the game when it comes to projects. If we are not bogged down with the routine stuff, we should be able to complete most of our project list before Memorial Day which will lend to a better quality course for our golfers and a smoother time for the heart of the season.