

Mid-Atlantic Association of Golf Course Superintendents NEWSLETTER

Published by this Association to aid the advancement of the Golf Course Superintendent through education and merit.

George Renault, C.G.C.S.
Editor

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A LOOK AHEAD

Below is a brief glance at meetings for June, July and August. Refer to your March Newsletter for detailed info and remember to make your reservation at (301) 381-0030.

June 9	Green Hill Yacht & C.C. James Kelly
July 14	Columbia Country Club Ken Ingram
August 11	Bretton Woods Rec. Center Gerry Gerard

An Open Letter to USGA

For many years the concept and practices of the USGA have confounded me, particularly that the green section acts as an advisory to the club on behalf of the superintendent. You have experienced it yourself on those occasions when you have unsuccessfully tried to sell an idea or a new purchase — everyone balks, or you get a “no” without commitment for future reconsideration. And then, along comes your USGA green section man who meets with you for four hours or so. He writes up his report and presto, you get almost all if not more than what you asked for earlier. Of course, he wrote a formal report which he sent to your Green Chairman, President and yourself.

What mystique! A person could almost come to believe in the existence of magic stationary, and all because that report produces such immediate obedience and agreement.

In all seriousness however, few of us disagree totally with the idea. While the

practices may be flawed, the concept has real merit. It's beneficial and prudent to get an outside feel for the place every now and again. In fact, it used to be and sometimes still is, a standard practice to ask your neighbor to visit for awhile, have lunch and then maybe play a round and discuss things. Now we seem to be blessed (?) with a consultant who swoops down telling all, and advising remedies. And you have the pleasure of paying extra for it!

As mentioned above, the concept of an independent, objective, expert analysis is beneficial. But how objective is that analysis? Do you really think the agronomist is going to speak the real truths about conditions in his letter to club officials? And how expert is his opinion? Just as book knowledge requires continual practical experience to maintain a high level of expertise, a USGA agronomist should return to the golf course

WINTER GOLF?

by Dr. Doug Hawes, Consultant

The green committee at a northeastern country club closed the course with the following note to members last winter:

“The grass-growing season for northern golf courses begins about April 15 and ends about December 31. During this time, the bentgrasses we encourage on greens, tees and fairways can recover with other plants that seek to encroach. During the entire growing season, an intensive turf maintenance and management program is directed totally to encourage more and more bentgrass and less *Poa annua* on greens, tees and fairways. This “battle” goes on during the entire growing season and if problems arise during this time, *Poa annua* is usually the reason! Heavy seed growth in the spring, slow putting surfaces, brown spots in greens caused by disease or wilt, uneven growth, excessive pollen to affect golfers with allergies all are problems caused by *Poa annua* that affect golfers and play.

Golf in the winter, when the bentgrass are frozen and dormant, totally favors *Poa annua*. *Poa annua* quickly takes advantage of any bentgrass weakness to gain foothold. *Poa annua* seed is ever-present and ready to germinate at the slightest opportunity.

Golf in winter compacts the soil . . . compact soils require more aeration during the spring and fall golfing seasons . . . and aeration at any time is disturbing to all golfers during the regular playing season. We reduced our program to one aeration of our greens and tees annually . . . with winter play, greens may have to be aerated at least twice annually during the regular golfing season. Aeration always requires heavy top-dressing — both are costly budget items.

Problems with golf turf in winter also concern involvement with soil temperatures and drainage. In winter, soil under turf freezes to depths from a few inches to several feet, depending upon the severity of cold experienced. Once the soil freezes, it negates all underground drainage until the frozen soil once again thaws completely. To compound the problem, part of the upper inch of soil thaws on sunny days, causing excessive wetness in this area from trapped water above frozen soil. Now this combination of circumstances results in severe compaction when play is allowed under these conditions because the thawed soil is compressed, vise-like, from foot pressure on solid ice below the thaw. Infrequently warm days will not thaw a deep freeze significantly. It takes 10 to 14 days of continuous air temperatures over 50 degrees for winter soils to thaw to a safe depth for play. SOIL TEMPERATURES ARE 10 TO 15 DEGREES COLDER THAN AIR TEMPERATURES. GRASS ROOTS DON'T BEGIN TO FUNCTION UNTIL SOIL TEMPERATURES REACH THE AREA OF 40 TO 45 DEGREES! The areas hurt most by winter play are greens and tees.

Therefore, in the interest of more enjoyable playing conditions for all golfers during the growing season, we deem it necessary to close the course from February 15 until we feel it safe to resume play in spring, approximately April 15.

We seek the support and understanding of all members in our quest for BETTER, STRONGER PERMANENT TURF with each and every passing year.”

Editorial Note: One course in our area — a public course in Fairfax, Va. — follows a similar policy. Reasoning is that winter revenues from greens fees would not offset the overhead and potential damage involved in maintaining open play. This may become a future consideration for country clubs, as the few who use the facility in the winter significantly drive up maintenance costs for the membership as a whole.

every 7 years to ensure that he remains current with conditions and practices. The Mid-Atlantic area with its many variables would be great for such a refresher session.

The concept and practices would be better implemented if the agronomist's services were included in the membership fee to either the USGA or state golf association. Establishing such advisories as a general benefit available to all members, as opposed to an enhanced benefit for those who wish to pay additional, would better protect the objectivity of the analysis. It might also be organized in such a manner as to economically fund refresher sessions. The prime benefit of such a change would be to the golfing community who pay in the long run anyway. Rich or poor, public or private, the entire golfing body would benefit without politics getting involved with maintenance and USGA practices.