

WINTER INJURY AND GREEN COVER FORUM

**Clem Wolfrom
Detroit Golf Club
Detroit, MI**

It's nice to be asked to speak to you about winter injury and green covers this morning. It's a subject that I have had some experience in in my thirty nine years of being a golf course superintendent--six years at Dearborn Country Club and starting my thirty-fourth year at Detroit Golf Club.

We talk a lot about experience we have had in our jobs. But the experience I remember best concerning winter injury happened in the spring of 1969. That year, in at least the Metropolitan Detroit area, we had an open winter in February and March. No snow, very cold windy weather. Greens were dying of desiccation. Many greens were lost completely. Fellow superintendents were asking each other what to do. A special meeting was called to gather information and ideas on our problems. Many superintendents hauled water in tanks to get some moisture on the greens. Others strung out hoses from neighboring houses to get water. All sorts of methods were used to try and get some moisture to the suffering greens.

Our good friend and sports writer, who has passed on, for the Detroit News, John Walters, had articles in the paper about the brown greens in town that spring. However, there was at least one superintendent in town that hosted the first pro-am that spring and John Walters also wrote about that: "Plum Hollow and Ward Swanson, the Superintendent, had the only green greens in the district." Of course, we all wanted to know what Ward had done to his greens that we didn't do. And this is his direct quote, "I airtied my greens real late in the fall because of other work and golf schedule conflicts. Weather was wet and we could not remove the plugs. Then it froze--leaving my greens with open airtied holes and the plugs laying on top of the greens all winter."

From this information that Ward shared with all of us, we deduced that the plugs provided protection from the wind and the open holes provided drainage. Hence, no damage. We all learned from this experience. You know experience is a good teacher. The only trouble is sometimes you get the test before you learn the lesson.

In the few years that followed many ideas came about on ways to protect your greens from the disaster of '69. Like "cover your greens with discarded Christmas trees." But did you every try to putt through an inch of pine needles in the spring? Or another idea was "cover your greens with marsh hay or straw." Great. In the spring just place the cup at the end of one of those rodent runways and bingo, easy putts.

I'm not saying all you young superintendents out there have it easy today. With all the research and technology we have, thank God for people like Dr. James Beard who immediately began his winter injury research and companies like those that Gene Johanningsmeier and Don Benham represent who developed covers for our greens. All these things have made springs like 1969 almost a thing of the past. It reminds me of an old plumber friend of mine who one day was relating to a young apprentice about how tough he had it when he started in the plumbing business. The boss would allow time to lay two lengths of pipe then he'd turn the water on and you had to keep ahead of it. Well, that's pretty tough. In the golf business we may have had it tough but not quite that tough. However, we did learn a lot from experience--yours and that of other superintendents who were always willing to share.

Getting back to covers on greens. In talking to a number of superintendents I find that basically covers are used for the same purpose. To protect greens from desiccation. Some prefer to remove covers before the green up

in the spring--others like to remove them after the green up has started. One thing all superintendents tend to agree on however, is that ice cover damage can still occur even with or without covers. Ice damage can be greatly reduced only by good surface and sub-surface drainage. This can be accomplished in many ways. From adding drain tile to low areas in greens (Mike Edgerton at Meadowbrook Country Club is in this process now) to completely rebuilding a troublesome green. Whatever we decide to do we have the results of research to back up our decisions. And the technology to implement our choice. Thanks for you kind attention and I hope we have all learned from the presentations this morning.