



On The Road With The USGA—September 2008

By Bob Brame, regional director, Central Region

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While there have been a few challenges this season, the weather pattern has been more user friendly to golf course maintenance than the last few years. This is a big step short of saying that it has been an easy year and that all courses should be in pristine condition. The reality is it takes a solid maintenance program to capitalize on less intense weather patterns. The gentler weather pattern this season does suggest that if your golf course experienced problems there is likely something out of line that needs to be adjusted. It could be staff size or operating budget, equipment inventory inadequacies are also a possibility, and then there is always the political pressure to push the turf beyond what is reasonable or beyond what the operating budget and infrastructure will accommodate. There are multiple things to consider, and prioritizing the process can be a challenge. In the final analysis, this process underlines the importance of utilizing the Turf Advisory Service to evaluate where adjustments are needed or, equally, to confirm where the existing practices should be continued unchanged. The tight economy has caused golf courses to rethink expenditures, but a yearly exam is not the place to cutback. Identifying concerns or confirming the existing maintenance practices will improve budget efficiency down the road.

Similar to the above discussion, allowing a milder weather pattern to justify the elimination of late summer/early fall core aeration is a mistake. The soil profile structure is vitally important to water management, and core aeration is the most efficient way of countering the negative impact of aging and growth on the upper profile. Yet, core aeration is commonly under attack politically and even more so when the turf has come through the season in good condition. Keep in mind, ongoing aeration and surface topdressing between aerations is aimed at maximizing health and dependability during hot and wet weather patterns. In fact, the entire maintenance program should be structured to maximize the health and playability of the course during difficult weather conditions as

opposed to milder seasons. Difficult conditions will return and since we don't know when it only makes sense to plan for harsh weather in 2009. Maintenance activity over the next few weeks, prior to the onset of winter, is setting the stage for how the turf will handle next year.

Gray leaf spot disease has been confirmed in the region and, as such, those maintaining perennial ryegrass should be on guard. Dollar spot, anthracnose, and even summer patch have been sighted on Turf Advisory Service visits over the last few weeks; however, the activity has not been intense. Insect activity has not been a major concern so far this season, although the annual bluegrass weevil continues to push into Ohio from the east and northeast, and there is some concern about possible grub activity yet ahead due to the high populations of beetles seen on a few courses.

Whether there are concerns at your course or a proactive desire to have the existing program evaluated, give us a call. We join with you in striving for a golf course that is attractive to look at, while enjoyable to play and reasonably economical to maintain.

Source: Bob Brame

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