



On The Road With The USGA—October 2008

By Bob Brame, regional director, Central Region

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Halloween, wow—it's hard to believe another golf season is wrapping up. Even though the weather has been fairly mild this season, the economy has been a challenge. Most golf courses visited in 2008 would like to increase their rounds played and/or their membership. No doubt, the economic challenges will continue into 2009.

Golfers are very good at assessing the value they're getting when playing a course. It's not always high end conditioning or low fees that get the nod. Sometimes a high end operation will struggle because the cost to be there exceeds the value or satisfaction realized. Conversely, there are low budget operations with correspondingly low fees and lower end conditioning that are packed. Does this mean the solution is to lower the operating budget and charge less? Absolutely not. It does mean the value (cost to play compared to what is offered) must provide separation from the nearby competition. Courses are competing for players, and finding the right balance between cost and conditioning is the key to moving forward in a tough economy. The process of finding the right balance is complex, which underlines the importance of subscribing to our Turf Advisory Service. The wrong combination of cuts or increases could start or intensify a downward spiral.

October visits confirmed that debris cleanup from the remnants of Hurricane Ike's winds continue to impact courses throughout Ohio and northern Kentucky. Unfortunately, such expenses are impossible to plan for, and yet it's very important to avoid cutting back on what will directly impact quality and dependability in 2009. As an example, if push comes to shove, leave the debris and complete needed aeration.

It's interesting that the worst dollar spot disease seen this season was in October. The issue was primarily mowing frequency, with conducive weather being a given. Less staff means more time needed to mow putting surfaces, which yields a longer window of leaf wetness. Not a big deal in October, right? Wrong. Dollar spot disease can occur at any time during the fall when weather conditions are conducive. Backing off fungicide usage during the mid and late fall (a common strategy) can further set the stage for trouble if the turf is allowed to remain dew covered well into the morning hours. The intensity is further elevated if it's a site with disease history. Any late season disease scaring can result in weak turf heading into the winter and on into next season. Players will take note of less than smooth greens even if they can't identify the actual problem.

The KTC Turf Conference in Bowling Green, KY, has come and gone signaling the start of educational opportunities in the lower North Central Region. Next up is the Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show during the 2nd week of December. Also keep in mind, a TAS visit can be scheduled during the winter months featuring a presentation and follow-up time of Q and A. What better way to candidly address site-specific concerns at your operation with the green committee, board of directors, or full membership. Give me a call to schedule a date or to discuss any concerns. We stand ready to assist in any way possible.

Source: Bob Brame

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