



It Won't Be Long

By Bob Vavrek, agronomist, Central Region

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cabin fever

Function: *noun*

Date: 1918

: extreme irritability and restlessness from living in isolation or a confined indoor area for a prolonged time

Perhaps Merriam-Webster's definition of cabin fever provides some insight regarding why those of us across the upper Midwest tend to be impatient and susceptible to making snap decisions about potential turf problems during that lull between final snow melt and spring green up. During this lull we look at brown, dormant golf courses each day and cannot help but wonder whether or not turf has sustained injury during the many thaw/freeze cycles that have occurred this winter.

Removing a few turf samples from greens and taking them indoors to green up is helpful, but it can be difficult to obtain a representative sample from putting surfaces that are a mottled mixture of bentgrass and *Poa annua*. Knowing where past winter damage has occurred on greens can increase the odds of success when sampling turf for damage. However, every spring I hear a story or two about a course where serious winterkill occurred on a green that had no history of injury in the past, so don't depend on a few healthy plugs of turf on a windowsill to proclaim damage-free greens this spring. On the other hand, if the plugs are stone dead, then you better formulate a recovery plan, and do it faster than our elected representatives.

The importance of patience was demonstrated at a nearby course the other day. A call to the office regarding totally unfamiliar disease activity on several greens made me grab a camera and take a look. The symptoms appeared a few days

prior to my visit along the low-lying drainage swales as the snow melted off the putting surfaces. They were described as dark purple spots of turf about the size of a quarter. The color alone piqued my interest.

By the time I had arrived, the wet areas on the affected greens had just begun to dry off and the unusual purple spots were still clearly evident and the symptoms were unlike anything I had seen before. However, the dark spots were only present on turf that was still submerged under a shallow layer of water. Where nearby turf had dried off a bit, these spots transformed into the straw brown lesions of classic *Microdochium* patch, none of which was evident a few days earlier. Anyway, there went our chances of discovering "purple blight" of cool season turf.

We make so many rapid-fire, day-to-day decisions about turf management throughout the growing season that it's hard to wait even a few days to address a perceived disease problem during spring. This incident made me more aware of the power of patience when turf is dormant. Remember, there isn't any play yet and the grass isn't growing. Jumping to conclusions may result in an unnecessary, costly fungicide application or, worse yet, incite some unneeded stress and panic to you and the golfers before the season even starts.

Source: Bob Vavrek

Central Region Agronomists:

Bob Vavrek, regional director – bvavrek@usga.org

John Daniels, agronomist – jdaniels@usga.org

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