

MAGCS Directors Column April Showers

by Jim Evans, Supt.

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How could I possibly write this column without first mentioning the weather. I have been waiting for a rainy day to sit back and relax, take my time, and write a dissertation on the cause, prevention and control of thatch. Being that this column is due for printing this week and that this morning is the first rainout since last November, I thought it would be a good opportunity to start writing.

The weather has and always will be a topic of conversation. For the golf course superintendent it's a way of life, we live or die by what mother nature deals us. What's the old adage, if you don't like the weather in Chicago wait ten minutes and it will change. I've always dreamed about moving further north to Minnesota or perhaps Wisconsin where the growing season is shorter and the hockey season is longer. But my wife was born and raised in the south and she has made it known that Chicago is as far north as she is going. After a perfect vacation in Florida this March, I thought to myself this is paradise, 60° at night and 80° in the day and always sunshine. My wife loved the climate and she kept saying maybe we should move down here. Sun, swimming and fun all the time, but I kept reminding myself this is just a vacation. I can't imagine maintaining a golf course 12 months a year when I have a difficult time with Chicago's short but intense growing season. Besides, I don't like six months of continuous 90°+ weather and it doesn't rain in Florida anymore either. Arizona is nice in the winter and during the summer with the low humidity, 118° in the shade feels like only 98° in the Chicago sun. San Diego has the world's perfect climate, that is what everyone tells me. If it was that perfect, everyone would move there, and then the population would be larger than Mexico City. So I am not going to pack my bags yet, at least not for California. We did start packing though, and we will move in July, at least four blocks further from where we now live in Crystal Lake. Yes folks, Crystal Lake does have the perfect climate, at least ten days in the year are perfect, and that is enough to make us settle here.

When I worked at clubs on the hot, humid south side of Chicago, everyone talked about the cool north side and how nice it was up there. So I moved up here to Turnberry and landed on bluegrass fairways and automatic irrigation. Carl Landgrebe used to call it a true "rocking chair" golf course, the kind where ya' just sit back, kick your feet up, and take it easy. Dick Trevarthan calls it "God's country." I can't complain, these past six years have been the most challenging and rewarding of my life, but I will say that the weather this spring has been the proverbial "pits". All those years when every spring we would complain how wet and cold the weather was, and how the weather changes from winter to summer in one week. So this is the first year in 25 we have had springlike weather in spring. The weather has been beautiful, but it is too dry for spring. My wife and kids think I'm cracking up. They say, "Dad, you are never happy with the weather. It is either too hot, too cold, too sunny, too cloudy, too wet, too dry, too windy, or too humid but

never perfect." Well, I told them I want to be able to program the weather. Man has been to the moon and back, and golfers honestly believe that greenskeepers have control over the weather, so why not do it. OK, I never want rain on Monday because it is our only day to work without interference from golfers, plus it is the grounds crews only day for golf. So when and how much rain would you like? Monday night between 9 p.m. and 3 a.m., 0.75" rain, and again Thursday night 8 p.m. to 5 a.m., 1.10" rain. All this rain must be intermittent and no gully washers please. Temperatures during June, July and August should be 50° at night and 75° daytime highs with low relative humidity. September and October can cool off with an increase in precipitation. Programming would sure make our lives a whole lot easier.

Of all the weather, this spring has been the ultimate in frustration. Maybe because we are not used to watering every night in April and May. I am certainly not accustomed to seeing bluegrass fairways under a heat and drought stress this early, maybe July or August but not now. Even after we got the irrigation system fired up three weeks earlier than usual our coverage was horrible for the wind was relentless. My assistant started calling the course "Windberry" instead of Turnberry. Day and night the wind blows here whether you like it or not. So we sent everyone out to hand water localized dry spots. We could only spray one tank of broadleaf herbicide each day from 6:30 to 8:30 in the morning, after 8:30 you can forget it. Laying sod or seeding was a lesson in futility. And then there was the dust storm of the decade. The day started out calm and sunny. In the morning, we had full intentions of going out and broadcast seeding the two club entrances we had just spent the week grading. By 10 a.m. my assistant suggested to postpone the seeding, as the winds blew 60 m.p.h. gusting to 75. The seed would have landed on Crystal Lake Country Club three miles to the east. Dust and dirt blew everywhere including our eyes, nose and throat. On the par 3 14th hole, you could stand on the tee, if you didn't blow away, and barely see the flag 170 yards away, that is how dark it was. Still there were 40 golfers that played that day. In all my years, I have never seen anything like it except maybe a blinding snowstorm.

I could go on and on, discussing and cussing the weather, which I am sure all of us do to some extent. But no matter what happens with the weather, there has not been one day when I didn't look forward to going to work. I can honestly say that I love the job of being golf course superintendent with all the ups and downs that go with it. All it takes it one good rain after a drought and the mental pressure is released. All it takes is one sunny spring day after two weeks of clouds, or one golfing member to comment on how nice the course is and then I am reborn. I fill up with enthusiasm and I am rejuvenated again, ready to face another day of challenge, ready to improve this already great profession. The next time I write an article, I will be sitting here at my desk, watching the snow pile up, and dreaming of those warm summer days. Then I will have the time for an indepth discussion on thatch and my theories on it's elimination. Until then, keep your head held high, and thank God we are here, willing and able to work to keep the grass green.