Getting With Golf Again ... The Great Lakes Region in '85

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There's a lot of land in the Great Lakes Region of the USGA Green Section. There's also a great array of golf courses and superintendents who maintain them. And with that mix of miles, men and means I will be forever grateful that 1985 was, for the most part, a gentle season for golf turf in this area.

First of all, the golfers started off happy — with one of the earliest, driest springs I can remember. There were no weekend rainouts. Cash flow was good. The pro shop staffs looked like toothpaste salesmen at a dentist's convention. Milwaukee actually had springlike weather when the calendar said it should. This was a first for me in 25 years here.

Superintendents, of course, have difficulties experienced by no one else in golf. The beautiful weather brought June grass growth in April with a January-size crew. The lovely southwesterly breezes dried out the unfrozen soil more rapidly than ever before and many irrigation systems weren't quite ready for the midyear stresses in May. But hold on — that was here in the flatlands. Our friends in the Dakotas and Montana were having a helluva time with spring ice problems — the kind that Jim Beard wrote classics about. Crown hydration ... dead grass ... recovery or reseeding or resodding. Like always, though, perseverance paid off and their season was successful.

In the spring, stresses also gave rise to the early appearance of the Xanthomonas bacterial problems in Toronto beat. The **real** bad problem didn't surface until June or July, but what appeared to be spots from fertilizer burn early on, passed final I.D. as Decline. The range of affected greens was the range that Toronto was planted, from Indianapolis to Minneapolis in well-maintained greens on high quality golf course. The bullet biting ranged from simple interseeding, to gassing and reseeding, to full scale rebuilding and reseeding, to the whole schmear of rebuilding with a new growing medium and all new sod.

Speaking of grasses, I think that Penneagle is getting alot of undeserved bad mouthing. Its only sin is that we don't know how to handle it - yet. Some of us remember that Penncross got the same treatment, because it didn't perform the way Washington or Toronto or South German bents did under the high nitrogen, high but programs then in use. Well, maybe we need to change our thinking again. There are **some** good Penneagle greens around. It makes no more sense to hang with a one pound of N per 1,000 sq. ft. per year program now than it did to stay with a six pound program earlier. But, if you don't want to change programs, don't change turf varieties. It's just that easy. Who said that new has to be better, anyway? New is only different.

The industrialists who get the blame for the international arms race are at it again except now they are working on golf courses. They put the con on clubs to begin using triplex mowers to get that 'Augusta-look' striping on fairways. This sells new mowers all around. But it's not the whole story.

The real goal of these propagandists is to get financing to develop new types of dethatching equipment and/or methods. Just think of the potential in all those acres of fairways! Then, when you get the bugs out, consider the gold in them thar lawns. Golfers love THE LOOK, but when the flying iron shots start showing up these plotters know that the superintendent will pay anything for a one-shot, one-day cure-all, whether it be animal, vegetable or mineral. We didn't reach this condition in 1985, but lightweight mowing must be counter-balanced by thatch reduction and the sooner the better.

There is one other potential problem which accelerated in 1985 - the choice of topdressing materials for greens Just as good suppliers of high quality sands are becoming known and their products and pricing somewhat stabilized, new variables are literally muddying the water. The variable is **any** untested additive to a topdressing sand. You can have the best sand in the world and mess it up royally with a poor grade of peat. How does **your** 80/20 (or whatever mix) stack up? And who said 80/20 was good anyhow. How much silt or clay or very fine sand is in the peat? The non-capillary pores (internal drainage ways) in a Medium Sand are pretty small, so it doesn't take much mud to block them. So why pay a premium for sand if you trash it up with **any**, repeat **any**, unknown additive? This, to me, is **THE** primary problem observed in the 1985 season.

Now here are the questions **you** need to answer:

1. If I can't judge sand quality off hand, how can I judge peat quality?
2. Who **can** judge peat quality?
3. What **is** good peat quality?
4. What do I expect peat to do for me?
5. Why buy **more** trouble?

The fall of '85 was the season that balanced the Midwestern year. Rotten! It was not a time for construction. Late fall and early winter brought ice formation to some areas and prompted a major mailing from my office. December is too early for 3-inch deep ice sheets — but they are still here in mid-January, but the thaw just arrived. I hope the sprayer and fungicides are ready if this thaw cycle continues.

From my angle, I'm grateful for a pleasant 1985. There were enough problems with great variations to keep anyone busy. It was not, however, a season devoted to putting out a lot of fires so there was time to look a little deeper into basic management techniques to get a handle on the direction that Midwestern golf turf quality is heading. From where I sit this snowy January morning, the direction is true and correct if we keep our minds on the basics for program development and our eyes on the cosmetics for people-pleasing maintenance operations. The two are indeed compatible.

These are the things that make up the lure of the Green Section today. Twenty-five years ago the work was mostly reacting to day-to-day happen-stances and the swings of nature. There is much less need for this today because golf course folks are much better educated and have more sophisticated tools with which to work. Note that I did not say smarter or better equipped. Today, golfers get what some people believe are better playing conditions. They certainly tax the skill of superintendents more than ever before.

My thrill in getting back to total golf work is that with better education and much more beneficial research involvement than in the pat, golf course superintendents not only recognize the real problems — soil conditions, water quality, the plants' survival capabilities and more - they are able to do something about them. The next decade should end band-aid maintenance of golf courses. I hope to be there, right in the middle of it and, hopefully, helping it happen.