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Green Section  
Great Lakes Region



## Rock Irons, Roller Bases and Harsh Reality

James M. Latham

Director, Great Lakes Region, USGA Green Section

The 1988 season is one of great challenge throughout the Great Lakes Region, mostly dealing with water (or lack of it) and water management (or lack of it). Early on, an unfortunate few courses relearned the vicious nature of crystalline water associated with ice sheet damage or freeze/thaw problems which caused winterkill of **Poa annua**. Not too long after the damage became evident, the pattern for the season was set — this was NOT to be a wet season. Few folks missed the opportunity in May to let the courses dry down to suppress the vigor of **Poa annua**. There was no warm, spring rain to get things started, though, and stolon growth on greens was slow to develop.

Irrigation became an all-encompassing chore at all but a handful of courses and water was applied with reckless abandon during the two or three months of southwestern weather we enjoyed. High evapotranspiration kept the pumps going and the sale of hose and rollerbase sprinklers reached an all-time high. Where an adequate supply of water was at hand and where there were enough hands to supplement irrigation systems, things couldn't have been better. Fungicide inventories gathered dust and trade-ins were being discussed ... until the last week of July or the first in August.

What hit the fan then was normal Midwestern weather — humidity and continuing heat. All of a sudden the applied water didn't go away. It hung around in the soil or thatch to act like a heat exchange out of commission. It kept absorbing daytime heat to keep things cozy at night. The outward re-radiation of heat at night was reduced and our temporary desert climate was replaced by a sauna. The fungicide folks were solvent again. **Poa annua** began to make its summer trip south, which is really unfair after all the water that had been poured on to keep it alive for two months. Reality returned.

About then, I wondered why we spend so much time, money and effort on the control of **Poa annua**, but when it goes away without any help why do we spend so much time, money and effort to replace P.a. at the inopportune time that it departs? Or is it a demand by golfers that green is the only acceptable color, no matter what? Hopefully, Green Committee people recognized that all things in nature are beyond the total control of people and despite our most up-to-date practices, some plants just sicken and die. And rather than becoming paranoid about losses, they will remain content with the turf that was saved. The spread of bentgrass in fairways did keep on keeping on — with less competition, so there was a bright side to the P.a. losses.

(continued on page 10)

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(Rock Irons, Roller Bases continued)

The true unfortunates this year are those whose water supply ran out, was cut off or perhaps worse yet, those whose water supply went bad. The contamination will have a prolonged effect on the soil. This did happen to courses in Canton, Illinois with sudden salt buildup and in Big Sky, Montana where the sewage effluent used for irrigation became a cause of turf deterioration. Both of these cases are reminders to have water analyses done every couple of years to track the condition of irrigation water. Had it not been for Brad Anderson's annual check at Canton, it is likely that the sudden rise in salinity would have gone undetected until the turf and trees were dead or severely damaged.

Water woes invoke the inevitable comments about poor drainage. Continued observations prove that greens built under **exact** Green Section specifications continue to perform admirably. Laboratory determinations continue to show that many peats are unfit for use with sands acceptable for putting green use because they have too much silt and/or clay in them. Like water, topdressing mixes should be checked periodically.

Incidentally, the USGA session at the North Central Turf Expo at Pheasant Run will feature all of the facets of Master Planning plus a description of the total renovation of the North Course at Detroit Golf Club this fall, by Superintendent Clem Wolfrom. Superintendents who are interested in course improvement should encourage their Committee Chairmen to attend this morning session on Tuesday, December 6.

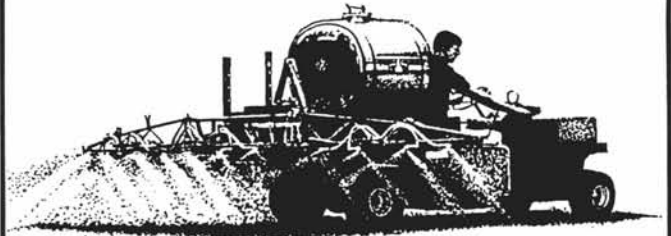
Localized Dry Spots (L.D.S.) were prevalent again this year in sandy mixtures — even on one new Wisconsin green — in April — before it had ever been mowed. L.D.S. were also prevalent on a set of Wisconsin greens that had never seen sand or much topdressing of any sort, with a two inch thatch under the playing surface.

This brings us to Rock Irons. There is a nice little course near the headwaters of the Missouri River, where the largest selling item in the golf shop are Rock Irons. The fairways are so stony that no one wants to break their new clubs — so they buy used 4, 5 and 6 irons for use in the worst areas. If they break 'em they just throw away the pieces and get another. That course, by the way, has a very active caddy program based on the Western Golf Association setup that is doing exceptionally well. How many 9-hole courses have 12 fully-qualified Class A caddies available?

One final note on quality at the end of a very stressful summer. The Chairman of the USGA Senior Amateur Championship Committee told the contestants at the contestants dinner September 19, that the Milwaukee Country Club was only the second course in his 28 (or 38) years of attending championships, which required **no** white paint. The only directive that the USGA's Tom Meeks gave to Superintendent Danny Quast was "Don't Change Anything!"

And that was "The Summer of '88." Some good, more bad. As we improve our understanding of water management under the environmental and cultural stresses to which golf turf is subjected, we will be better able to cope with similar problems in the future.

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