



Due to the poor growing conditions during the past several months, greens seeded last fall have barely begun to mature.
Note: Picture taken in late April 1996.

Greens that suffered the most during last summer's heat and humidity were ones dominated by *Poa annua* and handicapped by poorly drained soil.



Scouting Report: About the Weather

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It seems that for the past 10 months, the major topic of discussion throughout the Midwest has been the weather. Starting last July, the temperatures were soaring into the high 90s and low 100s in the afternoon and staying in the low 80s at night. In January and February, it was the exact opposite. The low temperatures were sub-zero. As I remember, it was -18°F when I left for the GCSAA Conference and Show in February. This spring, the daytime highs have been measuring 5°F below normal. (If you are an optimist, you can average the highs and lows and say that we have had an average year.)

The extreme weather has caused serious damage on many courses in the Chicagoland area. The hot, humid summer of 1995

resulted in the dramatic loss of *Poa annua* on greens, tees and fairways at many of the older courses. According to Dr. Randy Kane of the Chicago District Golf Association, the loss of *Poa annua* in many cases could be directly attributed to high temperature stress as opposed to pathogenic organisms. This being the case, the loss was generally more severe on courses with poorly drained soils that accumulated heat when saturated by heavy rainfall in mid July and again in early August. Along with *Poa annua* loss, unirrigated turf in the rough was also damaged by the extreme heat.

Having sustained damage, courses embarked on an overseeding program when the weather conditions were favorable in the fall. Unfortunately, due to the moderate drought conditions in some areas coupled with the early arrival of frost, the seedlings



With the lack of snow cover this winter, many courses have reported winterkill on greens. In this case, the damage was caused by desiccation on the high elevations of the green.



Low areas where melting snow can pool and form ice are particularly susceptible to winterkill.

struggled to reach maturity before winter. Not having had a normal fall season, the turf that did happen to survive the summer was also in relatively poor condition going into winter.

During a winter like 1994-1995, the weakened condition of the turf would not have been as great of a concern. This past winter, however, was exceptionally cold with less than normal snowfall. Without the insulation of snow cover, many superintendents have reported winterkill caused by either direct exposure to low temperatures or by desiccation.

The loss of turf this winter meant that courses had to once again overseed large areas of the greens, tees, fairways and rough. As luck would have it though, the weather this spring has been too cool to produce vigorous seedling growth. As a point of comparison, the flowering ornamentals are blooming approximately four weeks later than last spring. (Isn't it amazing what a 5°F difference can make!)

As previously mentioned, older courses with *Poa annua* and poorly drained soils generally suffered the most last summer. Courses under construction have not fared well either. Specifically, new greens that were seeded last fall have not developed sufficient sod strength, i.e., thatch, because of the poor growing conditions. This means that they will not be ready for opening in late spring or early summer, as would normally be expected. If opened prematurely, a new green would run the risk of severe thinning under heavy foot traffic this summer. As little can be done to revive greens when the temperatures are above 90°F, it is better to remain patient and put off the opening of new greens until they have fully developed.

There will also be additional challenges this summer due to the long spell of bad weather. Given the weakened condition of the turf, weed populations will have the opportunity to explode. Furthermore, the threshold for insect damage will be lower, so areas that in years past did not

require special treatment will likely be a problem.

Why talk about the weather when it could change tomorrow? One reason is that golfers are angry about having had far fewer opportunities to play during the past 10 months. Last summer was too hot for many to enjoy a full round of golf. Winter started early; and, as of this writing, spring is at least four weeks late. Combine these circumstances with the fact that the turf is not in its usual condition, and golfers are starting to transfer their anger at Mother Nature to the superintendent. Since no one, not even superintendents, can control the weather, it is important to emphasize that more fertilizer is not a magical "Silver Bullet" for what ails the turf. Patience and better growing conditions are what is needed to recover from the past 10 months of extreme weather. ■