

# RECOVERING FROM "THE SUMMER OF '95"

*Dave Blomquist, CGCS  
Naperville Country Club*

**A**s we embark upon a new year, hope springs eternal. Visions of pristine, lush, green playing conditions are dancing through everyone's heads. The absolute last thing anyone wants to think about now is "The Summer of '95." Maybe that was all a bad dream and golfers will show up this spring with a clean slate, oblivious to last season's problems and inconveniences. Well, I somehow don't think it will be that easy. As we know, when it comes to things like this, golfers have really good memories.

The underlying question from the golfers last year is WHAT HAPPENED? This season, if you haven't heard it



*Some clubs will be seeing these guys more often!*



*Usually a dreaded process – in 1995 most of us couldn't wait until it was time to aerify.*

already, the \$64,000 Question will be, What have we done to our courses, and/or management programs, so it won't happen again? I'm reasonably sure that everyone by now has found God and will reply to the aforementioned question by saying they are praying for a mild summer. After all, it wasn't our fault—right? We've never seen that kind of extended heat. Mother Nature threw a curve at us! We all know that it will probably take a little more than prayer to restore our courses back to pre-1995 conditions. A quick phone/modem poll of area superintendents has revealed some obvious, and not so obvious, replies to the \$64,000 Question:

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Recovering from "The Summer of '95"  
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### I am going to begin hand watering sooner.

As Bob Vavrek of the USGA has espoused in the past, some of us get in trouble because of water mismanagement. In the Chicago area, sustained 90°+ is unusual; but in Kansas City, for example, it isn't uncommon and, in fact, it's the norm. How do they do it? Three words: syringe, syringe, syringe. Here at Naperville C.C., we didn't take the severe summer heat seriously until heavy wilting set in. I normally get away with this because nighttime temps can be counted on to dip into the low 60s, providing relief. Believe me, this year I will have a syringe crew trained and ready to go as soon as the mercury begins to rise.

### I am going to increase my deep aeration program.

Joel Purpur at River Forest is

going to deep drill his greens twice this year instead of just once as in the past. He's not alone as the deep aeration contractors are already reporting increased interest.

### I told you so #1.

After many unsuccessful attempts to get his three to four thousand square foot push-up greens rebuilt, Kevin Deroo at Bartlett Hills will finally get his wish as the village gave the go-ahead to rebuild the worst ones. Nick Hongestino at Schaumburg C.C. is adding five new tees to an already revamped layout. "The amount of play warranted this as there simply wasn't enough time for our tees to recover from the wear."

### I need more stuff.

It looks like green covers are back in vogue. At River Forest, Joel noticed the greens which suffered from winter damage were

the first ones to give him problems when the heat began. As a result, he is going to purchase five more green covers for next year. Several Chicago area clubs covered all greens and will continue this program next winter. Selling an irrigation system was made easier as several clubs are finally upgrading their systems. Superintendents that have perimeter systems for green banks had one less worry as a major area of concern for most was juggling the water requirements for greens and adjacent areas.

### I told you so #2.

Many clubs which experienced problems maintain their predominantly *Poa annua* greens at one-eighth of an inch or lower. They don't cut low because they are masochists; superintendents respond to golfer pressure and club reputation. How many times

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superintendents who have dipped into the biological trends speak at the annual meeting.

### **Move the speaker up in front of golf.**

Rest assured, we will try that this year. Please show up early and support the effort when we do.

### **More education. Never be complacent with education. More events like Medinah during off-season.**

The March meeting has been expanded to at least two hours of education in the past few years. The Spanish class has now been offered three times in the past year. Despite small numbers, there was a CPR training class offered twice in the past couple of years.

### **No education at the summer meetings.**

At this point, we really don't feel this is an option. With no formal education, many members can not justify the expense to their club.

In closing, the Education Committee is listening to the membership and improving when possible. However, I would encourage you to be realistic with what you expect. Certainly, someone who has been in the business several years is not going to pick up 20 new ideas in an hour of education. I've never attended a GCSAA seminar and walked out with 8 hours of fresh information. I was told it's the "little things" that can separate your course from the one down the street. Sometimes, one or two new ideas that can be shaped into your operation make a whole day of education worth the effort. It all starts with showing up and participating. So please, when the education that you have asked for is provided, do your part by making yourself available. ■

can we preach: SPEED KILLS! **If golfers learned anything from last season, it's that necessary adjustments made to our maintenance program may affect play and, more importantly, keep the grass growing.**

Communication and education are probably the most useful tools in a superintendent's arsenal. At Hinsdale G.C., Bob Maibush used every opportunity to inform his members of the brutal effect of the summer heat not only at his club but throughout the region. Along with Dr. Randy Kane of the CDGA, Bob put out several press releases describing the weather's effect on our courses.

Dan Dinelli at North Shore C.C. turned last year's struggles positive. The wet spring demonstrated a need for drainage improvements, and the summer heat brought forth the need for precise irrigation and sound agronomics. Jacobson Golf Design was retained to formulate a 5-year plan designed, as Dan puts it, "to focus on the infrastructure. . . . This plan has very little to do with design of the layout as it deals with drainage, irrigation, green construction, and the use of newer bents." Dan normally takes a proactive approach in most of his management practices as witnessed in his extensive computerized weather tracking, micro-organism research, and a 10,000+ sq. ft. bentgrass evaluation nursery.

The membership at Chicago G.C. wants a dry, firm playing surface—and they got it in 1995. Superintendent Bill Whitley didn't put much water on the fairways and even less on the greens (in his estimation, 60 percent less). While there were localized dry spots on the greens, Bill assured the membership that although it didn't look as lush, it

putted fine. The die-hard traditionalist membership resisted overseeding the fairways until Bill was able to devise a seed mix that was more drought tolerant than creeping bentgrass so that they can continue to enjoy a dry, firm surface. The custom mix of colonial bent, chewings, and hard fescue will also require less plant protectants and fertilizers.

If the golfing world wasn't already aware, last season illustrated that the most important person at their golf course is the superintendent. Our programs have the most influence on the club's bottom line. Those courses that suffered damage last season also reported revenue losses. The food may have been tasty or the swimming pool refreshing, but if the course isn't "up to par," golfers simply won't show up.

The challenge is there for us to show the golfing community that we can rebound. Those courses suffering the most damage have already worked feverishly last fall to restore playing conditions. Golf course superintendents have a history of attacking problems head on. So, go ahead, golfers, have a good memory, because with Mother Nature willing, we are up for the challenge! ■

