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October is a good month to assess the successes and failures of our operations over the past season. It is late enough in the year to give us some breathing room to critically evaluate how we managed conditions. It is early enough to still see any lingering effects from a difficult summer, and begin to affect changes this year that will carry forward to next season.

While many of us were licking our wounds after the brutal weather of July, we should all have come away with an increased knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of our facilities. As an aside, I was particularly pleased to see in the press that Danny Quast was not apologizing for the condition of the greens during the PGA Championship, despite unfair criticism from some of the Tour players. It is amazing how many excuses some of the players can come up with for not winning the tournament three days before it has even begun. He undoubtedly had done an enormous amount of preparatory work leading up to the tournament, and, faced with the extraordinary conditions in the weeks prior to it, he was confident that his staff had done everything possible to ensure that the best

conditions possible were achieved. It was obvious that the greens were smooth and fast as desired. Hats off to Danny and his staff. Maybe you are one of the lucky ones who did not have any difficulties, but by and large I think all of us encountered some problems.

One of the challenges, frustrations and appeals of this profession is attempting to compensate for the things that are out of our control. Record temperatures challenge us to “think outside the box,” as does the fact that, although it may be imperceptible to most people, the golf course does change every year. Additional topdressing applications, segregation of bent varieties and the continued growth of trees—which increases shade and root competition—are just a few of the many factors that require an adjustment in our management from year to year.


There are no cookie-cutter management programs that will provide the best conditions possible for a given facility. Every successful management plan needs to be custom-tailored to the current conditions. Exceptional golf course superintendents recognize this and are constantly tinkering with their management plans to compensate for the ever-changing conditions of the dozens of microclimates they manage. It makes a pretty good argument for retaining your experienced golf course superintendent, because his history at that facility has allowed him to assess a number of successes and failures in arriving at the best maintenance plan for that golf course in that particular moment.

Conversely, it sometimes makes sense for a club to bring in a new superintendent. If the existing golf course superintendent has fallen into the rut of doing the same thing year in and year out for no better reason than, “That’s the way

we’ve always done it,” then a new perspective may be the proper solution. Part of our continued success is tied to constantly taking calculated risks in an attempt to provide better or more consistent conditions. This requires regular evaluation and experimentation.

Despite what we may be told, there are no magic bullets. I cannot begin to count the number of times I have been solicited to try something new because, I am told, it is the thing that will make my facility turn the corner to achieve Augusta National conditions every day. Often these suggestions have come from a member who was playing at another club and was told by someone other than the golf course superintendent that they were using some new product or piece of equipment that had completely turned around their conditions.

A basic management plan addresses the most critical issues of drainage and irrigation. Any deficiencies in these two areas were readily apparent last summer. A truly successful program is a comprehensive plan that may include the use of plant protectants, soil amendments, wetting agents, water conditioning, topdressing, growth regulators, cultivation, new seed varieties, specialized equipment and a limitless number of other factors.

This month and the months to follow will give us many opportunities to evaluate current and new technologies and information through seminars and trade shows. Take the time to learn and experiment as you prepare to close down this season and plan for continued success in the next one. 

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Robert J. Quast".