

## FEATURE II

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# Ten Years After

*I have an On Course article to write, and I'm spooling through my saved files looking for inspiration. My holy grail would be discovering something I had already written that hadn't been published yet, so I could send it in and go have a beer.*

No such luck.

But I did find something that was published in *On Course* over a decade ago that got me thinking ...

*Thoughts from the Pasture*

*I am not a turf manager; I am a golf course superintendent. My professional efforts are not designed to grow grass, in fact, a lot of what I do conflicts directly with best management practices of turfgrass culture.*

*My job is to provide golfers with a place to play their game, and a well maintained putting surface is a far cry from the ideal turfgrass environment. I have heard it said that we golf course superintendents are the only agronomists that grow their crop to its detriment. We aren't looking for high yields, and our harvest isn't measured in bushels. We subject our fragile crop to stresses that keep us awake at night all for the good of the game.*

*We mow our crop daily at heights measured in hundredths of an inch.*

*We often mow when it's wet because it's the only time we can do our job.*

*We roll surfaces that are already compacted from foot traffic that is funneled to one 4.25 inch spot.*

*We don't irrigate the crop when its needs it, we often have to wait until it is on the verge of wilt.*

*We do these things not because its good for the turf we do them for the good of the game.*

*These surfaces are regularly subjected to footwear studded with spikes that are longer than the height of the turf (thankfully this practice is rapidly losing favor among gentlemen and ladies).*

Remember metal spikes?

I got to thinking about some of the other changes we've seen over the past ten years so I fired off an e-mail (another change) to the usual suspects asking for some opinions.

*I'm doing an article for "On Course" about big changes in GC Mgmt. since the turn of the century. I'm not including anything to do with information technology (i.e., cell phones,*

*digital cameras, pdas, computers, etc.). Looking for "bricks and mortar" type stuff. Any input would be very much appreciated.*

It was a rainy day in October and I got a pretty good response. Thanks again to everybody who chimed in. I purposely eliminated information technology and communication from the list because it's everywhere in our lives and I wanted to focus on golf maintenance.

So here's the result of a totally unscientific survey ranked by the number of times each item was mentioned by the respondents. You may disagree with the categories and priorities, but hey, that's the whole point of rankings isn't it?

## THE TOP TEN CHANGES IN GOLF COURSE MANAGEMENT SINCE 1999:

### 10. Better, Less Toxic Plant Protectants

DMI fungicides were mentioned as well as insecticide innovations. One category of plant protectant earned its own place on this list – see below.

### 9. Labor Costs and Personnel Management Issues

I was a little surprised that this wasn't higher on the list because so much of what we do is directly affected by the quality (and quantity) of our maintenance personnel. One person actually wrote that superintendents becoming more visible has made the job harder because before "they" didn't know we existed and we could do whatever we wanted with our crews. He was kidding – I think.

### 8. "Spoon-Feeding" With Foliar Fertilizers

The variety of nutritional supplements available to the superintendent rivals a Major League Baseball locker room. You can be organic, holistic, biological or hard-core Vegan if you want. Soil, tissue, and water analyses allow you to concoct a fertility program designed for your specific needs.

### 7. Water Issues

Water restrictions affect management decisions. The need to practice competent husbandry of resources has become a necessity. Exploring options to squeeze every bit from a drop of

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water has driven the growth of wetting agent use, growth regulators and soil and water treatment apparatus. Irrigation technology has its own place on this list.

**6. Hard and Fast Conditions**

Players are more sophisticated and they have high expectations. Light frequent topdressing, rolling greens being commonplace (the pendulum really swung on that one), hand watering, and other cultural practices aimed at supplying the demand for hard and fast conditions (several people mentioned that using kiln dried sand for topdressing greens pays for itself, because the sand brushes in so well, you can do a light top-dressing between groups of golfers, without them even noticing).

**5. "Green" Initiatives**

Hybrid and electric equipment is becoming more commonplace. The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System has been around for a while. It and other ecological / environmental programs seem to have more support from golfers (as long as they are "affordable"). The notion that golf courses are "artificial" is becoming discredited. The golf course superintendent is perceived as a knowledgeable environmental manager.

**4. "New" bentgrass cultivars for putting greens**

A number of cultivars that have been introduced recently were mentioned for drought and disease resistance and their ability to tolerate low mowing heights.

**3. Sophisticated Irrigation Technology**

This is a very broad category including moisture sensors, variable frequency drive pumps, separate bunker irrigation

systems, drip irrigation, radio control, and nutrient and soil amendment injectors. This probably deserves its own top ten list – somebody else can do that.

**2. Growth Regulators**

Direct quote from a respondent – "What was kind of a Frankenstein experiment has become a regular part of mine and I think a large population of golf course maintenance programs."

And the number one biggest change affecting golf course maintenance since 1999 is...

**1. Spike-less Golf Shoes.**

A business miracle – the "customers" adapted voluntarily (pretty much) to suit the "provider" rather than the other way around.

A good thing to remember the next time you're crabbing about unrepaired ball marks or footprints in the bunkers.

**-OC**

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first time. The process began by spraying an application of Glyphosate on the fairways. Next, they were scalped two or three times, followed by verticutting in two directions. Basamid was then applied at ten pounds per 1,000 square feet and watered in heavily for three consecutive days. Curtis decided to seed greens at this time, so that any overlap from irrigation would hit both areas at the same time. After the Basamid had enough dry time, the fairways were verticut once more, blown clean, and ready for seed. The seed selected was SR 007 (60%), SR 1119 (30%), and SR 7150 (10%). The seed was blended together and applied at two pounds per 1,000 square feet. A chicken-based compost from Pearl Valley was added to the seed at 10 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Finally, the fairways were rolled for good seed to soil contact. Because of ideal weather conditions, establishment went well, and the fairways received their first mowing fourteen days after dropping seed. An additional step on approaches was to cultivate sand into the soil and add Aero San Mats (Futera) to keep seed in tacked on slopes when adding additional water to greens.

On the fifteenth hole, the length was reduced to create an enjoyable short par four. The hole now measures 345 yards from the back tees. Additionally, where frequent flooding once occurred on this hole, mounds were built and two new ponds were installed. Behind the tee box, where the old tees once were, facilities will be built to accommodate the 2012 Ryder Cup.

At the same time that all of this renovation was happening, the maintenance facility was torn down. Construction on a new one will begin soon. For the time being, Curtis and his staff have made great use of tents, the parking lot, and other buildings on the property for equipment storage and offices. The staff has been so busy, not only with renovation, but also with maintaining two other courses for daily play that they don't seem to mind not having a maintenance shop. Well, I'm sure they do mind, but it certainly hasn't stopped them from getting the work done. Great job to all, and the hard work will not go unnoticed. **-OC**



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