

## MIDWEST BREEZES

Charles Anfield, CGCS, *Heritage Bluffs Golf Course*



### Welcome to the Jungle

Let's face it, the last couple of growing seasons have been "easy". Cooler temperatures, moderate rain events, the poa is happy and "boom" you must be a great grass grower. No turf problems—just manage your budget, fertilize, cut grass and keep costs down. This season is a little different. The rookie Superintendents are getting their feet "wet" this year. Welcome to the Jungle.

By now we've all read the Turf Reports, measured the rain totals, been monitoring the humidity, dew points, soil temperatures and other weather data. That's all good stuff and helps quantify information but growing turf (especially poa annua and poa trivialis) on a golf course is much more than a simple 1+1=2 kind of scenario. A mature golf course is a living system that has thousands of turf bio types all slightly genetically different. Each course has design nuances with specific micro climates and soil types. Each course has miles of underground drainage pipe (we hope is working) and miles of electric wire and PVC irrigation pipe to help us flow water to turf being cut at very low mowing heights that it needs on a daily basis in just the right amounts to stay alive. The turf has to be monitored, measured, watched, roped off, inspected and above all protected. Oh yeah, **and** if that's not enough, people are going to walk on it, stomp on it, scuff it, dig into it, drive over it with cars and pretty much punish it for the sake of chasing the "little white pill" all in the name of golf. Good luck.

For the guys on the North Shore, their year started them behind the "8 ball" with the winter ice damage to turf and subsequent slow grow in. Sometimes the guys up north on the lake can have it tough, particularly in the winter. Down south of Route 80 we encounter some much warmer weather during the summer which presents its own challenges.

On June 30, Dennis Buck at Dwight Country Club had two F-3 tornados in tandem, touchdown and take a swipe through his golf course. The path of the tornados was about 600 feet wide. People who were playing that day took shelter in the clubhouse basement. A couple pulled off the hi-way seeking a deep, dark hole to hide from the twisters. He lost 35 mature oak trees

that were 150 years old. The wind just tore the tops branches right off most of them and uprooted a few. A new maintenance shop under construction got totaled. The cart storage barn lost its roof. There were no injuries at the course but the twisters kept moving toward downtown Dwight and there were fatalities. "The Members really chipped in and helped with the tree removal. We're going to come out of it O.K." Buck also lost some of his low lying fairway turf areas that flooded which are adjacent to the creek that runs through the course.

At Heritage Bluffs we got 2.5" of rain on the same night as the tornado in Dwight which added to the already high precipitation totals for June. We got 4.10" in the last week of June/early July. Add that mix of water with the temperatures in the 90's plus high humidity and it's not pretty. Most of the turf we lost was in low lying fairways areas where the water had nowhere to go. The turf just sat there and cooked in its own juice. A primordial stew if you will. Other areas that suffered turf loss were predisposed to stress being in high traffic areas such as cart cross over points and mower stress areas. Almost all of the turf we lost was either poa annua or poa trivialis. The lower traffic areas in the approaches and the fairways we restrict golf cart traffic to survived the best. Coincidentally these areas have the most bentgrass.

Clint McLaughlin at Wedgewood Golf Course in Joliet lost a lot of his fairways areas in the heavy rains associated with the storm that created the tornado. "One day we were green and the next day a lot of turf went brown". Clint had to get off the phone with me as he had an incoming call from Chris Plumb with Absolute Service. Chris was there to service one of his pumps. A good running irrigation system will be vital this year to keep what we have left alive.

Andy Wedge at Morris Country Club suffered a similar fate in his fairways. "We've got some wet areas that just hold water. We probably lost about 5 acres of fairway turf. When it gets cooking there's nothing you can do about it. We're getting a little beat up around our collars. I'm just amazed at how fast it

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can turn". To add insult to injury, Andy's 12 year old German shepherd dog, Blackjack, passed away last week. I met him, he was a "cool dude" that commanded respect when he walked into a room. Andy has since re-seeded some of his damaged areas. "This year is a tough one; we've already been punched in the nose. Everybody needs to lace up their boots".

I called Pat Norton who oversees Nettle Creek Golf Club in Morris and Ravisloe Country Club in Homewood. "In Morris, we got water soaked, then the heat and we got pythium. We fertilized it and are running regular irrigation, so a lot of it has bounced back. I think most people understand the situation. We just need to get through it".

I spoke with Dr. Derek Settle of the CDGA. "The turf was not conditioned for this heat. We were breaking records for precipitation in June. You could say this is an atypical season. Most superintendents are behind in normal activities. Add to this a tremendous amount of disease pressure. Right now if you took a square meter of turf you could find active pythium, brown patch, dollar spot, fairy ring and isolated dry spots. We've seen more brown patch than I've ever seen since I started in 1997. Brown patch requires a **minimum** of ten hours of leaf wetness. This is the worst heat stress we've seen in the last three summers, maybe longer". Derek has been very busy making visits to courses and writing reports to help support CDGA Member courses.

A lot of Superintendents and their Staff are doing all they can, putting in long hours, just trying to keep the poa alive through the summer. It is a tough task, often times out of our control. This season will test communication skills. It's always best to be transparent with information and tactics. That being said, many laymen just don't get the science of turfgrass, it's a tough "sell". The perception is often times that someone did something wrong. They see the course down the street with no problems and they wonder why their course is having such a hard time. It's a real challenge to not get defensive and feel like you did something wrong. Educate and communicate.

The fact is all golf courses are different. They have different volumes of play, different turf types, different construction techniques, different budgets, different microclimates and different expectations. Unfortunately one thing all golf courses in Chicago do have in common is that we are all trying to grow cool season turf in a very hot summer. It's "just a *fish out of water*". Now we know how the Superintendents down in Kansas City and the transition zone who try to grow bentgrass feel during the summer.

Bottom line: golf is played on an outdoor living surface and we can't control Mother Nature. This will be a season where good previous year's agronomics will pay dividends and communication skills will be tested. **-OC**

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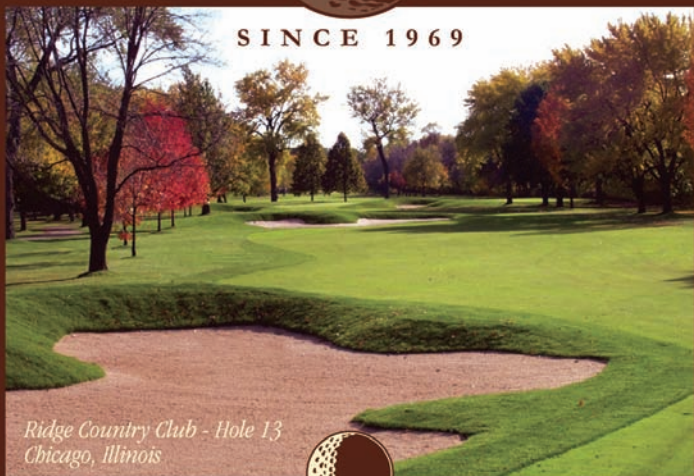
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