

MIDWEST BREEZES

Charles Anfield, CGCS, *Heritage Bluffs Golf Course*



Winter on the Lake

Winter is always more severe and longer in the Great White North and this past winter was no exception. Granted the north side of Chicago is not close to the Arctic Circle but it does have the more pronounced lake effect of Lake Michigan and the growing season is at least two weeks shorter than down in my "neck of the woods", south of route 80. Many courses got heavy rain on December 23rd and then everything froze solid until March. There were casualties. I called a few guys up to check in on the healing process.

Rick Bowden at Bob-O-Link Golf Club in Highland Park sustained most of his damage on low lying fairways areas and some "bird bath" areas on greens. "It rained and then froze right after Christmas. There was a lot of ice. You could have ice skated down our fairways. Even the Members commented that it didn't look good. I knew problems were coming. Most of the damage was on three fairways that run east to west. It seemed like the damage was more pronounced on the shaded south sides of the fairways". Rick has re-seeded all of the areas and has about 60% recovery at this time. "We seemed to have a lot of snow mold even on treated areas. I think the ice cover exacerbated the snow mold damage. I can't recall the last time we had such significant damage from a winter. The players are

happy with the lift, clean place rule in effect in the fairways and the greens are rolling phenomenal. Our rounds have been up a little with the warmer weather and we have some new Members that have recently joined the Club".

I caught up with Tim Davis at Shore Acres Golf Club in Lake Bluff. He was out setting up the course for an Illinois Senior PGA Match Play event. I asked Tim if he had any ice damage. Never one to mince words, Tim said "oh yeah. I think the shade issue is much larger than we think. It seemed like even the poa would survive better without the September, October shade issues. The plant is trying to produce carbohydrate reserves for the winter. It doesn't get as much sun as the other turf and is more likely to fail. It's just not as healthy as it should be to prepare for winter conditions". Tim has cut seed in four different directions, spiked it with a "job saver" and covered the areas. The cooler weather along the lake has not helped with the grow-in. He expects to get full recovery by mid June. Tim plans on cutting trees down where ever possible especially on south and east sides of holes. "I'm going to raise my mowing heights in the fall to promote more leaf area and create a larger carbohydrate reserve for the poa". Tim had one last tidbit of

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experience to pass on, "it seemed like there was a lot of poa seed heads this spring. History has shown that you should get your irrigation pumps ready". Good advice.

Mike Matchen from Wilmette Golf Club in Wilmette had only one problem with one green. "Our #6 green has everything wrong with it. It's always been a bad area for crown hydration injury, a forever problem. Its small, tucked in the woods, all poa, no drainage and built out of clay. We tried to cover it but it was a total loss. We plan on rebuilding the entire site this season. We lost maybe a couple of hundred feet of turf in low lying fairway areas. One thing we did was to go out and plow snow off of the ice covered greens just prior to a January thaw. We got lucky and about 85% of the ice was melted. We used applications of black sand to help the melt the remaining ice".


Brian Green, CGCS from Sunset Valley Golf Course in Highland Park was at "ground zero" for the poa ice carnage. "We sustained quite a bit of damage. I've worked here for 30 seasons and this is by far the worst damage I have ever had". Brian conducted a survey from surrounding golf courses to gather information about the ice damage. Its goal was to gather information, assess tactics and trends from the damage that can help Superintendents prepare for recovery and future winter preparations. The common denominator of the survey was the ice sheet that covered turf for 80 days. As we spoke he watched as the puddles formed in the fairways as it rained on the damaged areas. "It's been exhausting, seeding, covering and uncovering. I need to be patient during the grow-in. Everyone always thinks we have it easy along the lake in August. We seem to pay for it in the winter and during the spring with the cooler temperatures

and the slower green up. We still have trees that haven't leafed out yet". Some other trends Brian deducted from the survey: covered greens fared better than non covered, ice removal didn't help, bentgrass greens did very well, shaded sites were worse than direct sun exposure sites, heavy topdressing was a non factor, and low lying non draining areas fared worse than higher areas. I don't think anyone is sure on the actual cause of the kill. Was it crown hydration injury, disease, anoxia: a gas build up, low temperature kill or any and all of the above?

My Golf Course Superintendent friends in the Pacific Northwest went through a poa direct kill in early December. There are no easy answers and it is not pleasant for anyone. Often times, fingers get pointed at people who have very little, if any control with the overly shaded sites and absolutely no control over adverse weather conditions. There is not much research on this phenomenon. Most turfgrass researchers are plant pathologists. It is also difficult to do research in the winter under snow and ice, conditions are brutal. We often hear of this phenomenon happening to courses in the northeast or up north. This year it happened here. This topic is a very sensitive and turf loss is very personal for each one of these guys (and the rest of us) as they go through their recovery process.

The take away messages are clear:

- Bent is better than poa for overall hardiness.
- Shade is bad for sun loving turf plants that need to survive harsh conditions under low mowing heights. Choose turf over trees.
- Winter weather conditions are a "wild card". Prepare for the worst, hope for the best.



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- The more drainage, the better. Low lying areas are a "bull's eye" for winter crown hydration.
- Protect the poa.
- Network with your peers, take photos, keep records.
- Anticipate and communicate with your owners.

You can add this to the list of "What do Golf Course Superintendents Do in the Winter"? We worry about our turf under the snow and ice. **-OC**

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