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MARCH 2012 Volume 65 No. 11



Native areas at Arrowhead flow with the layout of the course as captured here in the early fall.

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A photo from the Arrowhead archives, an overhead picture of # 15 on the east course taken in the early morning after an evening of showers early one fall.  
Photo credit: Luke Cella

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The Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents (MAGCS), founded December 24, 1926, is a professional organization whose goals include preservation and dissemination of scientific and practical knowledge pertaining to golf turf maintenance. We endeavor to increase efficiency and economic performance while improving and enhancing the individual and collective prestige of the members.

The MAGCS member is also an environmental steward. We strive to uphold and enhance our surroundings by promoting flora and fauna in every facet in a manner that is beneficial to the general public now and in the future.

All editorial and advertisement inquiries should be directed to Luke Cella, Publisher, *On Course*. 11855 Archer Avenue, Lemont, IL, 60439. (630) 243-7900 or visit [www.magcs.org](http://www.magcs.org) for rates and requirements. Statements of fact and opinion are the responsibility of the authors alone and do not imply an opinion on the part of the officers or members.





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# MAGCS 2012 Meeting Schedule

*Upon return from the Golf Industry Show, it is time to jump right in to our season and I'm sure this year will be no different. Each year, when I return, I always appreciate the Midwest and its members. The GIS is a great place to catch up, network and rekindle friendships and meet new people in our industry. In fact, there are people that the only time I see them each year is at the Midwest Hospitality Reception – and they live and work in the Chicago metro area. That's the old joke, we travel 2000 miles to see each other once a year when we both share the same backyard. Let's make 2012 different as I invite and challenge each of you to attend a Midwest meeting this year.*

The Golf and Arrangements and Education Committee have done a great job lining up venues, tweaking the championships, and setting up pertinent education topics for us. Let's not let them down. Put the dates on your calendar and plan to carry on those conversations and relationships started in Las Vegas. Not everything has to stay there!

Midwest members Mike Mumper, Justin Kirtland and Tim Johnson will host our March meeting at Arrowhead on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Our old friend, Dr. Lee Miller will be on hand to present a very timely talk on "Efficient Use of Spring Fungicide Applications for Disease Management". He will be followed by our new USGA Agronomist, Bob Vavrek talking about the 2011 season with his talk entitled, "From the Freezer to the Fire".

Tim Anderson, CGCS MG and Steven Biehl will host our April meeting at Naperville Country Club on the 25<sup>th</sup>. We'll play our traditional Spring Scramble and many of us look forward to seeing the new layout at this historic club.

The ITF and MAGCS combined meeting will take place at Twin Orchard Country Club on May 21, Kyle Jacobson host. The golf event in years past for this fundraiser has been a Ryder Cup format that pits each foursome's cart partners against each other. It has been a while since we've been at the "Twin" and this promises to be a popular event.

A place we've never played will be the site of the Midwest's June meeting, Blackstone Golf Club in Marengo on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Andy Perry, the new golf course superintendent at the facility will host us and prepare the course for our Class C Championship and Dom Grotti contests. We look forward to playing this course, designed by one of our very own – Bob Lohmann.

Be sure to attend the John Buck Memorial Golf outing on July 10 at Bartlett Hills Golf Course. Kevin DeRoo will host this event that raises money to fund the Midwest's Scholarship fund. We'll be awarding the Midwest Scholars this year, as in years past at the Midwest Family Night Picnic on July 14 at the Kane County Cougar ball game. The new upper deck

*(continued on next page)*







has been reserved for us, plan on bringing your family and enjoying some small town baseball in a fun and relaxed setting.

Jim Knulty will host the Midwest's Golf Championship on September 24 at Big Foot Country Club. All of the MAGCS championships will be contested across the border; the Regular, the Senior, the Super Senior, and the Commercial.

The Midwest Annual Meeting and Turf Clinic will be held at Medinah Country Club in November, most likely a little later than the first week as in years past. The Illinois Turfgrass Foundation is moving its Winter Workshops to early January and creating a Turf Conference centered around education. Look for more information soon from the ITF.

Also, if you are so inclined, the Midwest booked the Hotel Solamar in San Diego (think rooftop event from 2010) for February 6, 2013 for the next Hospitality Reception – but please don't wait until then to see your friends and acquaintances. **-OC**





## FEATURE I

Dave Marquardt, *Dirt-n-Turf Consulting, Inc.*



# See What You're Looking At

*I don't remember many childhood jokes, but one that I have always loved is about a science class that wants to research how far a frog can jump. (Yes, probably funded by the government). The class puts the frog on the floor, and shouts, "Jump frog, jump!" The frog proceeds to jump 12 feet, and they record the data; frog with four legs jumps 12 feet. To continue their research they remove one of the frog's legs, place it on the floor and shout, "Jump frog, jump!" The frog jumps about eight feet, so they record the data; frog with three legs jumps eight feet. Furthering their research, they remove one more of the frog's legs, place it on the floor, and again shout, "Jump frog, jump!" The frog jumps about three feet, and they record the data; frog with two legs jumps three feet. Continuing, they remove yet another of the frog's legs and again place it on the floor with the familiar shout, "Jump frog, jump!" The frog, now with only one leg, jumps about one foot to the side and they record the data; frog with one leg jumps one foot. In their effort to be thorough, they remove the final leg, place the legless frog on the floor, and shout yet again, "Jump frog, jump! Jump frog, jump!! Jump frog, jump!!!" The frog goes nowhere, and the data are recorded; frog with no legs can't hear.*

Ok, as silly as that sounds, I think that it does illustrate a problem with some of the research that shows up in golf. A colleague who knew I was writing this said, "Sometimes we rely too much on science."

Now, to qualify this and so I don't end up with a bunch of unwanted emails and pen pals, I am not bashing science, scientists, or research per se. In fact as an agronomist I make my living relying on soil and fertility science and much of the research that has advanced our field. No...the point, to paraphrase a quote that I believe came from Dr. Carey Reams, 'we must see what we're looking at.'

This quote has two implications when it comes to research. The first is that not everything in nature is as simple and quantifiable as research would like it to be. The second is that when we look at research findings we have to look beyond the conclusion and deeper into the method.



Both of these implications come together in the barrage of rants we have heard about the use, or the insinuated overuse, of potassium. For some reason, researchers have spent the last decade trying to get superintendents to lessen their dependence on potash. I can't imagine how much money has been spent on this, let alone the ink and paper to print the findings. Now, again, I am not a researcher. I, like most of you, am an observer. We analyze plant and soil

chemistries, the visual/physical condition of the turf, and then make educated decisions for improvement. Once applications and cultural practices are initiated we observe the results, check the science, and file the results in our memory banks. This to me is research at its best.

Each spring as client visits begin, we hear the same questions, "What did you think of \_\_\_\_\_'s talk on potassium or phosphorus, or calcium?" "What did you think of \_\_\_\_\_'s

*(continued on next page)*

talk on aerification and profile modification?” Answering these questions is difficult. It requires seeing past the hype and picking out the pieces that are applicable. As I continue to remind clients, if you abort proven practices based on incomplete studies and you fail, then who will lose their job, you or the presenter? Pretty simple isn’t it?

OK, examples. Back several years ago a speaker came to the area and spent two hours presenting research about the overuse of potassium. At the conclusion of a two-hour rant a client showed the speaker his water report, which revealed all the sodium he was pumping on his course. The client then asked if he would need higher levels of potassium. The speaker agreed that our bent/poa greens would require more potassium to compete with that much sodium. Now, wouldn’t it have been more appropriate for the speaker to have qualified his comments during the presentation? What about the superintendent who listened, went back to work, cut his potassium use, and lost his wear tolerance? Who would be hurt?

Again, sometimes we need to ‘see what we’re looking at’ and not take everything at face value. Ten years ago I had a new client. As we reviewed his past practices he informed me he was using about 12# of actual potassium/1000sf per year. When I asked why, he simply replied, “I like the way my greens respond.” After his lab reports came back, it was obvious why. He had a high sodium water source at a club with a higher than average round count. On top of that, many of his greens had minimal air movement, which resulted in wet greens where flushing the sodium was difficult. This superintendent, this researcher, had found that as he increased his use of potassium, his wear tolerance increased and the playing conditions improved. This superintendent ‘observed what he was looking at’ and responded to it.

In another case a client had 8-10 year old greens that were covered with algae and moss. When we met in the fall, I suggested he would probably want to gas them off and reseed at some point, since they were just so bad. That fall, after studying his chemistries, he applied 1# of P and 2# of K/m and covered for the winter. He called first thing in the spring and said his turf was amazing. Ten years later he continues to manage his phosphorus and potassium, has cut out much of his nitrogen, and we no longer discuss renewing

his turf. Through increased plant density and wear tolerance this client ‘saw what he was looking at,’ responded, and improved. Is the moss completely gone? No...but it is tolerable and regressing. Did P and K stop it? I doubt it. Did a better turf environment make a difference? Of course it did.

In yet another case, a client worked to improve his potassium levels throughout the year. In the fall he was playing golf with a salesman and a couple of colleagues. He called me to report that the day’s conversation was all about the extreme amounts of dollar spot everyone was seeing and that he had no need to spray. Is there any research to suggest that potassium has an effect on dollar spot? None that I’m aware of, and I certainly wouldn’t suggest that there is. I would however suggest that this client, just like the previous one, had improved his soil and plant nutrition, was saving on fungicide budget, and enjoying improved turf as a result.

Potassium is not the only target; humates, calcium, and phosphorus have also caught the ire of researchers. Even silicon has gotten some attention lately. A few years ago there was a study that suggested that the use of silicon did not improve wear tolerance on greens, yet client after client who uses it sees improved turf and wear response. Several clients have even seen less anthracnose after beginning to use potassium silicate. Tissue analysis reveals higher levels of potassium and silicon after the products were applied than before, which confirms that the turf is absorbing the silicon. Is this enough to help the turf compete with disease? Again, I wouldn’t say, other than to say that we know that the strong survive much longer than the weak.

A further look into the trials themselves reveals that after treating the turf with silicon products, a rotating wear wheel was used to test the wear tolerance of the turf. I suggest that if the research had actually been performed on a golf course with typical golf wear, and in conjunction with a qualified super-intendent, the results would have been more applicable. Indeed, if one looked more closely at the amount of wear created by the wheel, one could apply the jumping frog findings and conclude simply that ‘grass dies where there is wear,’ since the untreated turf plots also wore to nothing. When we look at research processes, it is important to ‘see what we’re looking at.’

My opinion: superintendents need to remember that they are the experts. They are the ones in the trenches doing the







job day in and day out. Add to that the budget concerns of the last 6-8 years and research can rest assured that clubs are not applying products that don't yield a response, measured or not.

Again, I need to qualify my perspective. No, not all research is frog ridiculous, and the majority is very good. I have always applauded the work of our CDGA staff and their work with area courses and clubs so that their findings can be published with authority. The same is true of my trips through the research farm at the University of Illinois. This is hard core information that is often repeated on area courses, which makes it applicable for the superintendent. I love to walk onto courses and see Bruce Branham's velocity trials in active fairways, or Derek Settle's Fairy Ring or Dollar Spot trials on in-play greens. This is research that superintendents can hang their hats on with confidence and risk their jobs on.

I encourage superintendents to look deep into research studies and see just how the work has been performed. Often, it's important to know who paid for it and what the purpose is. I further encourage that caution be taken before making wholesale changes to programs that have proven successful. If you question silicon, use it on the front nine and not the back, and judge for yourself. (Don't just pick your worst and best greens since there may be other issues at play that skew your results.) The same is true for potassium or some of the new information regarding phosphorus. Cut back on nine holes and monitor your results. 'See what you're looking at' and then implement the best management practices that fit your course, your water and soil chemistries, your play level, and your expectations.

And finally, for those who fund research: it's high time that Golf Course Superintendents be included in the evaluation of proposals and that they and their clubs are compensated for their

involvement. I could spend all day writing about the innovative nature of these experts, the products they use and get results from, and the methods they use to continue cutting budgets without sacrificing the quality of the turf. As we know, research funds have become more and more restricted. By including the superintendent we would assure that research studies would provide 'real time' data that would solve 'real time' problems and save 'real time' budget dollars. **-OC**



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## FEATURE II

Matt Kregel, *The Club at Strawberry Creek*



# On Course with Hilgy, #63

*It is hard to believe that I have been the superintendent with The Club at Strawberry Creek for seven years now. I remember the 2005 MAGCS hospitality room at the Golf Industry Show, in Orlando, when I first heard about the job opening. Tom Prichard and I were drinking a few cold ones with Rick Jacobson, who had designed the course. I had heard the rumors like everyone else. Former Chicago Bear, All-Pro Center, Jay Hilgenberg, was building a golf course just across the cheese curtain in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Rumors that Michael Jordan was involved were running wild, but those proved to be false. Who knows how those ever started? Jay and partner, Barry Shiffman, spearheaded the development along with two other silent partners.*

It was incredible to meet Jay at my first interview. I must have done alright with the first interview and not have been too star-struck, because I was asked back for a second one. When the job was offered to me, I felt like I was on cloud nine. Not only had I landed my first superintendent's position, but my boss was a Super Bowl Champion Chicago Bear. Could it get any better than this? Do you remember 2005? It was a cool, wet spring followed by a hot, dry summer. Not the best of conditions for trying to grow in a brand new golf course as a rookie superintendent. I could write a book about that project, but we'll save it for another day. [ed note: I will hold him to that.]

The most common question that I get asked about my job is, "How it is working for Jay Hilgenberg?" I can honestly say that it has been a very humbling and rewarding experience. The golf course is set on what was once a strawberry farm. A number of years passed from the time Barry and Jay acquired the land until construction began. During that time Jay walked the land and enjoyed the property that would eventually turn into his baby.

Once construction began, Jay was on the property every day. He checked on progress and watched the course that Rick Jacobson had laid out on paper take shape. He took the time to talk with everyone involved in the construction process. He enjoyed being out and getting dirty. Jay even operated some equipment early on helping to stay on top of the mowing. Once I hired my seasonal crew I had to relieve him of his duties. No, I didn't fire the owner, I cut him.



*Jay Hilgenberg and his dog Ed take a break after walking The Club at Strawberry Creek.*

I have had many opportunities to showcase my golfing skills, or lack thereof, with Jay. He is a pretty good stick, maintaining a five handicap. It's never good to beat the boss, but I'll never have a problem with that. As he can see from my game, I am a good superintendent because I lack the skills it takes to be a golfer.

Like many superintendents, Jay possesses a very keen eye that the average golfer doesn't have. He notices the little things such as changes in mowing patterns, triplex lines on the greens when we walk mow, new flags that were recently put out. It makes it very difficult to slip something by him. He appreciates every effort that my crew makes on the course. He hates seeing divots. This is why he wouldn't allow

Richard Dent on the course for the longest time. Dent takes a small rug with every swing.

Many of you have met Hilgy, if you have been to Strawberry Creek. He also gave the keynote address at a Turf Clinic a few years back. He is a very personable and approachable. He loves talking turf with superintendents.

Here are two of many stories that Jay has shared with me:

When we went up to Lambeau and played the Packers, that was during the time where the quarterback didn't have to run a play if the crowd was too loud. We were on the one-yard line going in, and McMahon was taunting the Packer fans, being really brutal. They were too loud so he wasn't going to run the play. He was just taunting the Packer fans up.

*(continued on page 11)*



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