



# AFTER A PERFECT

# Storm

**Bloggers from around  
the nation share their  
frontline stories  
from the summer of 2010**

## Trust your training

Grant Huffman relied on his instincts to persevere through one of the most challenging summers in recent memory.

I was excited about the opportunity when I asked to submit an article about the summer of 2010. This summer was my toughest mental test in a decade within the industry. However I managed to get through without any noticeable turf loss, and as the summer went along the turf became healthier. Nothing I am about to say is going to be “earth shattering” but I hope the key points to my success this past year can help others in this business succeed in the future.

**Fertilizers:** When it comes to granular fertilizer I kept applications closer together with slightly less than typical half pound of N rates. Fairways and rough applications were organic and spaced out every month and a half and tees were on a monthly cycle. On greens and tees I used organic fertilizer and sulfate of potash during aerification in the spring, with a gypsum application before the summer stress hit, followed by a standard dormant feeding in the fall. Liquid fertilizer was applied every two weeks and incorporated into the spray program on tees and fairways with weekly applications on greens. I added standard liquid fertilizer in every spray with a rotation of molasses, manganese, processed fish meal, iron, kelp, and calcium. This rotation was performed every month during the growing season. This allowed for keeping away from the “peaks and valleys” and made for a consistent N and micronutrient feeding all season long.

**Regulators:** When the dry and hot weather hit a lot of people backed off on the amount of regulators being used. I use rates that have been termed “suicidal” by some but didn’t back off. I think this plus the use of multiple

“ This was definitely a summer for uninformed players to ask questions such as, ‘Why don’t you just run the water at night?’ or ‘How come the rough is turning brown?’ or ‘Don’t you guys put any water out here?’ ”

## Preparing for combat

Justin Ruiz says his region’s annual “monsoons” are a double-edged sword.

Imagine you are working at a club taking care of the course for an elite and affluent membership. You wake up on a nice morning at the start of summer knowing that you have one less day of water to use this summer. Welcome to The Rim Golf Club.

At the start of every summer we have a total of about 60 to 65 days of storage. We rely on the summer monsoon season to come at the end of June or the early part of July to give us relief from the hot dry summer. The arrival of the monsoon weather is a double edge sword. It may relieve us from the hot dry conditions but it also brings the pressure of hot humid conditions.

What we have done to combat such a difficult season is two-fold. First, we combat the hot dry conditions and limited water storage with efficient and creative water use. We have done extensive programming changes to our central control and physical adjustments in the field to become more efficient on our nightly water applications. To continue to extend our efficiency we have created portable irrigation. We can effectively target smaller, localized areas that large rotors would be in-effective at watering. We have also started to bring the perimeter of the course back to the irrigation heads so that we don’t waste water out in the native areas. All these techniques are enhanced with the use of a quality wetting agent to ensure adequate infiltration.

Second, we have created a successful IPM program to defend ourselves from

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regulators in the program had a huge impact on the performance of the turf.

**Cultural Practices:** REMEMBER THE BASICS! Most everyone pulls cores but who remembered to verticut, spike, groom, top-dress, and deep-tine tees, greens, and fairways this past season? How many of you think your turf would have performed better if you did? Tees and greens were verticut three times and fairways once. Top-dressing and spiking greens was performed every two weeks. I got more from my spiking unit by taking the turf guards off which allowed for deeper penetration with little more disruption than with the guards on. Find a good large area spiking unit and your fairways will be thanking you all season long. Greens were groomed once a month with a deep-tine aerification in the fall.

**Soil and Water Testing:** When is the last time you had a soil/ water test done? Do you guess as to what the soil and turf is lacking and do you just assume your water supply is free from pollutants? I have two separate soil/ water tests done each year. The spring and fall soil tests came back with everything in acceptable ranges. I believe this is another major reason the turf not only survived but thrived this season. The spring water test came back with high sodium levels and the fall test was perfect. I could address the sodium issues before even charging the irrigation system because this simple test was performed. If soil and water chemistry is in balance success will generally follow.

**Employee Training:** How many of you took the time to properly train your employees on how to hand water or mow properly? Do you notice your employees take the same route across the turf day in and day out? Are you confident your assistant(s) could keep the course alive and thriving if an emergency were to arrive? Too much water is a recipe for disaster but just the right amount is priceless. Showing a crew member the proper way to turn a mower around and training them to take different routes across the course can save your turf from stress. I check myself a few times a year by showing up 30 minutes late when everyone is out the door and then observe what is taking place. The only thing this year I would have changed was a crew member taking a triplex with groomers instead of one with verticutting units. I didn't blame him... I blamed myself!

**Water Management:** Knowing how much water to apply is by far the most stressful part of my job. I went to school to study agronomy... not predict the weather! Use a thermometer. Take a pocket knife and cut a piece of turf and tug on the roots. Use a soil probe. Never guess. It will only lead to disaster. One water management technique that works well is making paper copies of your greens, tees, and fairways, and highlighting the areas that seem to burn out and get "hot" the quickest. Use the newer wetting agent/ surfactant technologies to your fullest advantage.

**Get Rid of the Poa:** Another reason I survived this year is that I have been on an aggressive *Poa* eradication program and letting desirable grasses take over. *Poa* is almost nonexistent in tees and fairways and the greens are up to 75-85 percent bentgrass. There are few sweeter sights than seeing *Poa* being encircled by bentgrass! Use herbicide and regulator advancements and verticut to promote lateral growth in bentgrass. Also, is it really going to break your budget to purchase a little more bentgrass seed? It is worth the investment.

Maybe the best advice I can give is trust your instincts... what is your gut telling you? Nothing is wrong with seeking advice, but most likely you know your facility and turf needs better than anyone else. Don't be afraid to experiment and think outside the box. If some of you think that everything discussed in this article seems expensive I oversee the maintenance for a thirty-six hole property with a maintenance budget under \$750,000. If anyone has questions or would like to know more detail on something particular that is summarized in this article I can be reached through my Website at [www.onparwithgranthuffman.com](http://www.onparwithgranthuffman.com). Here's to better weather and fewer sleepless nights in 2011.



**GRANT HUFFMAN**, superintendent,  
Heritage Hills Golf Resort, York, Pa.,  
[www.onparwithgranthuffman.com](http://www.onparwithgranthuffman.com)



Justin Ruiz: "This past summer has been another year that validates our efforts toward water conservation and effective plant management."

the hot humid weather that partners with the monsoon season. Counting degree days, scouting and trapping insects are some of the techniques we have been successful at over the past three years. Ensuring that pesticides are used at the correct timing, we avoid over applying chemicals or even worse missing the correct timing. The IPM program has gone hand in hand with our efforts toward water conservation. If we can keep the root feeding insects at bay it is inevitable that less water is needed to keep quality conditions.

Each summer has been more difficult in one way or another. If the monsoons are late then we are counting down the days that we have left of our storage and are challenged by getting more and more creative on how we can keep the course playable. If the monsoons are plentiful, we await the onslaught of turfgrass disease to challenge the accuracy of our knowledge and foresight.

This past summer has been another year that validates our efforts toward water conservation and effective plant management. Using a few simple procedures we have been able to continue to keep our water usage reduced and our problematic pests at bay. As the weather seems to get more extreme each year it just makes us strive to get a little more creative and a lot more humble.

**JUSTIN C RUIZ**, CGCS, The Rim Golf Club, Payson, Ariz.

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