



John E. Kaminski, Ph.D. is an associate professor, Turfgrass Science, and director of the Golf Course Turfgrass Management Program at Penn State University. You can reach him at kaminski@psu.edu.

WHERE DID THE SUMMER GO?

As we move into fall, take a look back at your year to begin prep for 2014.

It's already September and, as always, the summer seems to fly by quicker and quicker each year. Despite an unusual low amount of pest activity reported on golf courses across the country, this summer was no exception.

As all golf course superintendents are aware (and most golfers and members forget), Mother Nature was again the star of the season and in total control. For those of us in the Mid-Atlantic, the spring started out very slow with moderately cool temperatures delaying the season.

While this was somewhat of a problem for getting the turf going in the spring, it was probably more of a problem for golf rounds across the country. I recall everyone's excitement about rounds being up when we had an early spring in 2012. Speculation about hitting a "turning point" as it relates to the business of golf was being proclaimed by many. After the slow start this year, however, it appears that Mother Nature was likely to blame for the increase in rounds in 2012 and the decrease in 2013.

The relatively cooler temperatures continued into early summer and on top of that, June was marked with record setting rainfalls. Philadelphia received its highest recorded precipitation with over 10.5" of rain for the month. Many golfers remember this as it coincided with a little golf event called the U.S. Open. During the week, I recall thinking that there was more grass on the greens at Merion than I had seen at any other time... and this was during a major event.

So June came and went and again things didn't seem to be changing much with regards to the moderate weather. Most golf courses had healthy stands of grass and probably more rough than they wanted or their members could handle. This was the

case until July when one hot and wet weekend was followed by about three weeks of "hold on for dear life."

During the month of July, disease outbreaks went from reports of moderate dollar spot to overnight outbreaks of Pythium. It was apparent that summer had finally arrived. I spoke with numerous superintendents during this period and saw my share of disease samples. Everyone was in panic mode and felt like things were finally getting back to what I consider a "normal" summer. However, as quickly as summer arrived it decided it would leave in the same manner.

During the month of August (at the time of writing this) the highest daily temperature (according to weather.com) in Philadelphia was 88F and occurred on a single date. Even better were the nighttime temperatures, which occasionally dropped into the 60's. This year was definitely different and far from normal.

The unusually cooler summer wasn't without its problems though, and turf loss was still evident in some locations. In the Northeast, annual bluegrass weevils again seemed to steal the show. According to reports in the Turfpath App, adult weevils first were observed in the Maryland region in mid-April and continue to wreak havoc now.

Overall disease activity seemed to be low to moderate. Dollar spot developed on a fairly typical schedule in most regions and was relatively severe early in the season. Pythium and algae dominated July as heavy precipitation occurred in conjunction with the three week stretch of high temperatures. On the other hand, reports of diseases like summer patch were lower than normal.

Despite what I would consider an easy year as far as temperatures and stresses were concerned in the

mid-Atlantic region, other areas weren't so lucky. Reports of unusually high temperatures in many locations throughout New England resulted in some considerable stress to annual bluegrass not acclimated to the heat.

While this report focused primarily on what I observed in the mid-Atlantic and Northeastern US, it should be pointed out that other parts of the country had experienced their own unusual summer. Much of the Western US had the warmest July on record, while other areas continued to experience drought conditions. In contrast, Florida's July was among the wettest on record.

“Unusual seasons like this are always a little concerning for me.”

Although the season is far from over, many golf course superintendents took advantage of the weather and widespread reports of "it's the earliest I've been able to aerify ever at our course" were seen throughout Twitter and Facebook. As we head into the fall, those courses that made it through the summer unscathed will likely have the healthiest turf heading into winter. For those courses that didn't escape the damage, the relatively mild temperatures should afford the turf the ability to recover quickly.

Unusual seasons like this are always a little concerning for me. In year's where death and destruction is widespread and the result of an angry Mother Nature, everyone seems to get a free pass. In relatively mild years like 2013 (for some regions), it seems that many clubs use any small decline in

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firing is justified. How do you know your job is in jeopardy? Members (and especially those who sit on committees) stop talking to you. Meetings are held without your knowledge and attendance. Outside consultants unexpectedly show up to evaluate your efforts. Other superintendents unexpectedly show up to “look around,” or play golf with the pro or members. (The professional thing to do is to call the superintendent and let him/her know that you’ve been invited over, even if it’s possibly for his job.) And sometimes it’s just a feeling that things aren’t right.

Can you turn around a bad situation? Probably not. And given the message that the club is sending, do you really want to? Maybe it’s time to take the initiative and go, before you can be pushed out. But if you do leave, and expect to get another job, remember how you felt when in that awkward situation, and don’t put a fellow member of your industry in that same situation. **GCI**

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Above: Two images of the new channel next to the old one at Reid Golf Course.

right – across a valley – to a putting surface on the far hillside. Players used to fly that concrete channel with their approaches. Soon they will crest the hill and see a beautiful, winding, naturalized water feature. Yes, of course, that feature is part of a system that can now handle a 100-year storm, and the water exiting that system is 10 times cleaner. But the 12th hole will also be a more beautiful golf hole, and that should count for something. It’s already counting for something.

“I haven’t golfed for about 15 years,” Neuberger says, “but I’m going to play when the course reopens next spring. I’m excited.” **GCI**

Bob Lohmann is founder, president, and principal architect of Lohmann Golf Designs and a frequent GCI contributor. Check out his blog at lohmanncompanies.blogspot.com.

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and satisfying for very little extra cost. While I promised not to focus on value, the old insurance salesman adage of, “Good architecture only cost pennies a day” applies.

Golf can range from deadly dull to inspiring. While everyone prefers the latter, they often preclude even the chance for the best golf possible by treating golf course architecture as less important than it truly is. Poor architecture usually ruins your golf, so when you have a chance, don’t shortchange your course when it comes to architecture. **GCI**

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declined. In those markets, property taxes also should have declined. Check with your local taxing jurisdiction to see if your property value declined and if your tax needs to be adjusted.

The question to ask: “Have I explored the possibility of a decrease in property taxes with my local tax authorities?”

The start of 2014 is still more than three months away. But your planning should be well underway. That process starts with the budget. **GCI**

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playing conditions to bring out the hatchet. In these cases, it’s usually not really about the grass.

Although I simplify the impact of Mother Nature to regional generalizations, I have to add a qualifier. Regional conditions can not only be variable from state to state and course to course, but also from hole to hole. We can’t forget the impact of microclimates that can result in poor growing conditions and continued decline in turf stands year after year. Correcting some of the fundamental agronomic issues – shade, air flow and drainage – is essential to growing healthy grass.

So with all of this in mind, I encourage you to assess where your problems were this year, get things healthy this fall, and fire up the chainsaws this winter. The season’s coming to an end and 2014 will be here before you know it. **GCI**