

“I would recommend to anyone who has an opportunity to prepare for a large event to do so. It will involve so many different aspects of your job – from large scale renovations to making sure the gas cap is tightened until it clicks.” – Tom Alex, Grand Cypress Golf Club, Orlando, Fla.

and we could lose surface smoothness.

**Q: WHAT WERE THE CONCERNS OF THE LPGA ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE?**

**A:** Having worked with the Rules field staff before, there were some minor concerns.

John Miller, the LPGA agronomist, had concerns about adding sand to the bunkers so close to the event. His worry was playing consistency as it related to depth, firmness and playing quality.

In addition, I reviewed with John a plan to reach tournament green speeds of 12 feet and surface firmness as the event approached. We took extra care with green speed due to the recent Nicklaus renovation.

Our crew worked closely with the LPGA field staff as our putting surfaces are full of undulations. If we weren't careful with speed and firmness, ball roll became unpredictable. Putting green irrigation applications were a top priority. Our Rain Bird moisture sensors, installed in many of our green soil profiles, helped our hand watering tremendously.

Finally, the over seeding density for fairways and primary rough grass were a concern in that we did not want a thin or cupped ball lie on the fairways or too thick a stand of ryegrass in the roughs.

Overall, it was good in the roughs and thin in the heavily trafficked fairway areas.

**Q: AT THIS STAGE IN YOUR CAREER IS IT WORTH ALL THIS EFFORT AND WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE THOSE LOOKING TO BECOME INVOLVED IN TOURNAMENT GOLF?**

**A:** Yes, most definitely I would do it again. These big events are a wonderful challenge and re-energize your career and attitudes. Even a short-notice project like this one gets the juices flowing again.

Although it has been nine years since my last event, not much has changed. The grind is still there. I would recommend to anyone who has an opportunity to prepare for a large event to do so. It will involve so many different aspects of your job – from large scale renovations to making sure the gas cap is tightened until it clicks. **GCI**

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# Treading new turf



By Monroe S. Miller

## Brian Zimmerman makes the journey from golf course superintendent to head one of the country's premier park systems.

**B**rian Zimmerman never imagined he'd one day be doing work similar to what he did as a kid.

Brian grew up on a family grain-and-beef operation in southern Wisconsin, between Basco and Paoli. Like nearly every other farm kid, he helped with the chores necessary in keeping beef cattle healthy. Each season saw him involved with crop production – cultivation, planting and harvest.

And these days, he is doing nearly same work as the executive director of Cleveland Metroparks, a job he started March 15. He is coming up on his first anniversary as only the sixth director in the park system's 94-year history and is the youngest to ever fill that position. These days, the animal issues he faces don't involve Angus or Herford cattle, but more unique animals like those found in Cleveland's premier zoo. When I spoke to him recently he had just returned from checking progress on the zoo's new elephant exhibit.

And those field crops he grew up around have been replaced by turf and trees, shrubs and flowers and a lot of other plants that require planting, cultivation and harvest, just like corn and soybeans.

Brian's responsibilities at Metroparks are formidable. The park system, Ohio's oldest, covers 22,000 acres, includes a zoo, seven golf courses, requires a \$100 million annual budget and employs 600 people. He is, however, well prepared for the job, and the roots of that preparation are deep in golf turf. In fact, he is a former superintendent.

Whispering Pines farm is only a half hour from the University of Wisconsin – Madison, and it was an

obvious choice for college for Brian. His career choice – turf management – was influenced by a couple of things – pleasant times on a golf course with his grandfather and the fact that his godfather (Randy Smith) was a golf course superintendent. Add to that the similarities between golf turf management and production agriculture, and the decision was easier for Brian than it is for most incoming freshmen.

Like most undergraduate turf students, Brian spent summers as an intern; the Nakoma Golf Club and Maple Bluff Country Club, both private courses, got him started on his career. Graduation led to a career launch in Milwaukee at the Brynwood Country Club, another private golf club where he was the assistant superintendent for three years.

An opportunity in public golf opened at the Washington County Golf Club north of Milwaukee, a new Arthur Hills course. Brian stayed there for about 18 months.

His next stop was the chance to become a golf course superintendent, at the Chikaming Country Club in Lakeside, Mich. It was at this job Brian fine-tuned his renovation and organizational skills as the club embarked on some significant changes and improvements. When Brian, wife Jill and son Carter left Wisconsin for Michigan, they thought that they would someday return to be near family.

They called Michigan home for three years. In 2002 Brian applied for the superintendent position at Brown Deer Golf Course, one of Milwaukee County's 16 golf courses and the site of the US Bank PGA Tour event. After interviews and phone calls, Brian was



asked if he would be interested in a regional manager position, making him responsible for all 16 golf courses. The position also included managing all turf areas in the park system. He took the job and was on his way to learning about running a big park system.

Brian's work was noticed, and in 2007 he was named operations manager for the Milwaukee County Parks, Recreation and Culture System. It's a large system – 15,000 acres, more than 400 employees and a \$51 million budget. The park system received a national gold medal award during Brian's tenure and that drew the attention of the Cleveland Metroparks as it began a search for a new executive director. The rest is, as they say, history.

Despite being separated by a generation, Brian and I have a lot in common. We are both former farm kids (and proud of it!) and

we are both grads of Wisconsin's turf program. Our golf course experiences in college were at the same two golf courses, and these courses have been managed for years by my colleagues and contemporaries Randy Smith and Tom Harrison. We were members of the same fraternity while we were undergraduates, and as a result I have known him since his late teen years. I caught up with Brian for a couple of hours one cold December afternoon and talked with him about the challenges of his new position.

**Now that you've been working as executive director for almost a year, what kind of shape is Cleveland Metroparks in?**

"I was really fortunate to follow in Vern Hartenburg's footsteps. He directed Metroparks for 22 years and in his career won three national golf medal awards for

excellence. This is an award a system can only apply for once every five years. Vern was an outstanding leader. Metroparks is known for its financial integrity and its reputation is second to none. Our branded logo is highly recognizable. We've had three clean audits with no negatives, usually unheard of. Vern changed the face and the dynamics of Metroparks and retired with our three main missions – conservation, recreation and education – well positioned for the future.

**Was Vern Hartenburg available to help you transition into the position?**

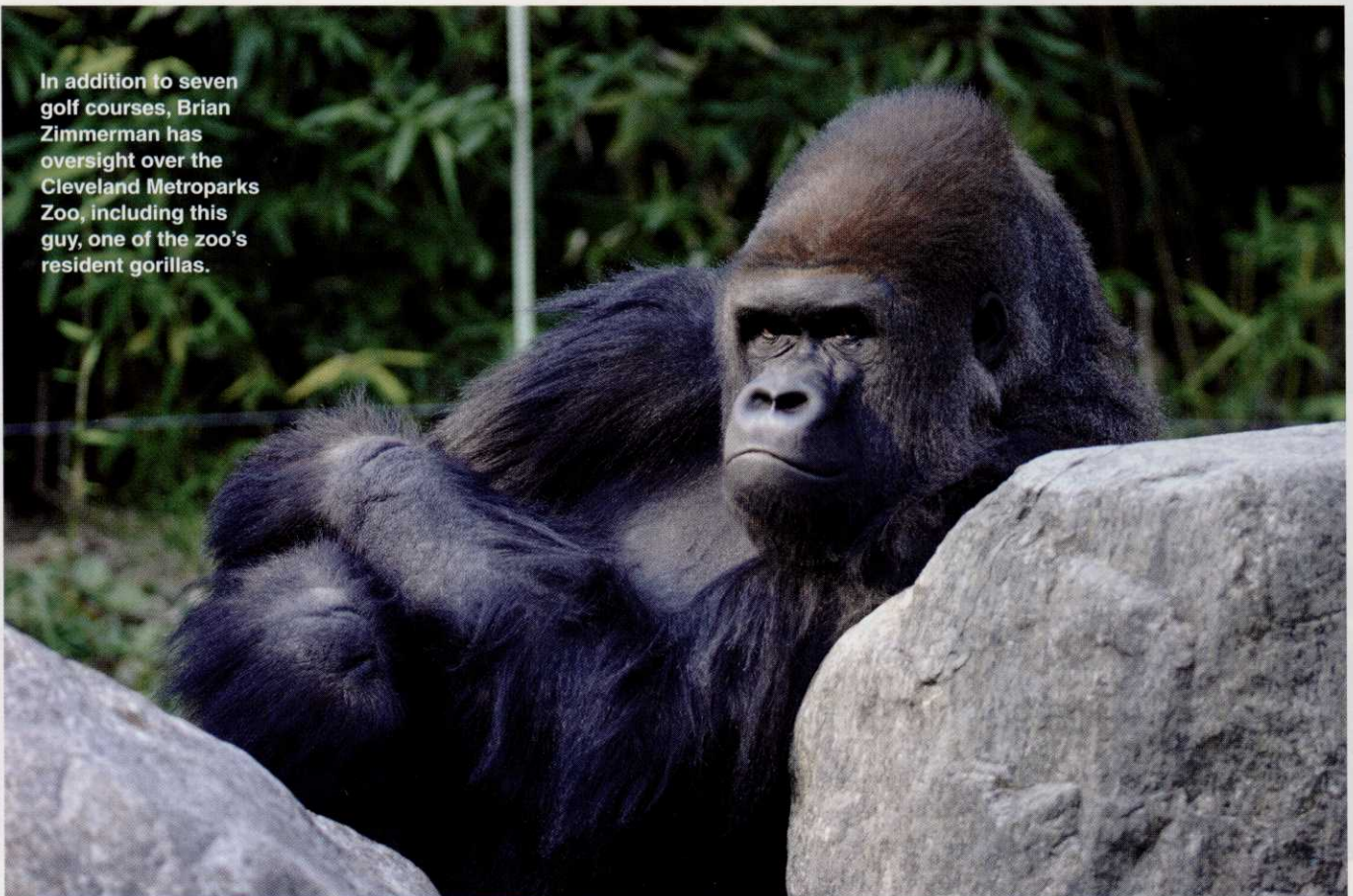
He was. And I was very happy about that. Vern was a Pugsley Award winner, an indication of his peers' respect. I embraced the opportunity of learn from him. Anytime he spoke, I recalled advice I heard years ago – "You have two ears and one mouth for

a reason." Metroparks is a big operation and I valued his help after I arrived.

**How is golf doing in Cleveland and the courses under your wing?**

I just finished working through the budget process for golf and turf, our marketing program and the clubhouse operations. Our revenue and expense projections are such that a little subsidy will have to be provided. I guess we're like the national situation – we've struggled. But we are on par with everyone else. We're constantly looking to retool any aspect of the golf operation to improve it. We are planning to get people in their 50s and 60s more involved with golf since they have raised their families and may have a little more time. We are also talking about golf as a way to treat the "nature deficit disorder."

In addition to seven golf courses, Brian Zimmerman has oversight over the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, including this guy, one of the zoo's resident gorillas.



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As executive director of Cleveland Metroparks, Brian Zimmerman is responsible for 22,000 acres, including a zoo, seven golf courses, a \$100 million annual budget and 600 employees.



### Do you miss any of the day-to-day activities of being a golf course superintendent?

To be honest, I have the chance to participate in many diverse activities, from work with the zoo to working with a golf course architect like Bruce Mathews, to ranger details and labor bargaining. Variety is one of the appealing aspects of a superintendent's career, and as the park director, I have even more. It's much different, however, than dealing with day-to-day activities on a course. It might be that my job is actually less stressful!

### What is your biggest challenge in operating such a large and diverse operation?

I have nine direct department reports coming to me. I look to helping bring out the best in all of them. We want our residents to be clear about the direction of Metroparks and have confidence in the way we run the different aspect of the park district. I focus on youth programs, our users of

the future. Great staff is key to a successful organization.

### You were elected president of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association before you were selected for the Cleveland job, and you continued to lead the chapter through to the end of your first term. How much of a challenge was that?

I remember, as an undergraduate, helping Randy Smith assemble our chapter directory and I was impressed by his dedication to the chapter. As I moved along I saw that same loyalty in many superintendents in other projects. Watching colleagues banding together for a common cause was an inspiration. I wanted to give back to the Wisconsin chapter in the same way. I spent years on the board and as an officer, preparing myself to be president.

The other officers and directors were very happy for me to have this opportunity in Cleveland. Previous presidents had put

our chapter in a position to hire a chapter manager, and that made it possible for me to preside from a distance. Technology made it easy to communicate – email, cell phones and Skypeing.

My goal was to highlight the importance superintendents have in golf, not just turf. I believe I helped in that regard.

### Has your farm upbringing influenced your career?

First of all, seeing the struggles of farming up close made it clear to me farming wasn't anything I was interested in. There was always so much uncertainty, but there were lots of good lessons to learn. A farm is a small business and there is a lot to be learned from that. The job at hand had to get done. Farming teaches a stick-with-it attitude, which is always helpful. And I do believe in the old saw "You can take the boy off the farm but you can't take the farm out of the boy."

It is interesting that of the six of us who have served as execu-

tive director of Metroparks, three of us were raised on a farm.

### Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten? At career's end?

Right here in Cleveland. The opportunity I've been given is one I take very seriously. I look forward to renewing a number of levy campaigns. I'd be lucky to finish my career with Metroparks.

### What advice do you have for a superintendent who may want to move beyond a golf course career?

Always put yourself in a position to learn and be successful. Don't be afraid to try something out of your comfort zone. Think out of the box. Be willing to volunteer because the experience could be helpful in your future. Don't limit yourself; always expand your experiences. **GCI**

Monroe Miller authors "The Monroe Doctrine" and is a frequent contributor to GCI.

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# 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 aeration 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

“ Using a few simple procedures we have been able to continue to keep our water usage reduced and our problematic pests at bay.”



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.

[www.therimgolfclub.blogspot.com](http://www.therimgolfclub.blogspot.com)

# Overcoming adversity

For Tom Shephard, his crisis wasn't weather related. Instead, overseeding presented its own unique hell.

“ After everything was finally seeded and we just needed to keep the new seed wet until it germinated, we encountered a major problem. On Sunday afternoon around 1 p.m., our irrigation computer crashed – ever experience that wonderful feeling?”

We encountered more adversity over-seeding process this year than we ever have. Hat's off to my staff for not only overcoming it, but for keeping on schedule as well. It all started when our Turf Vacuum – used for picking up the scalped clippings – blew its engine a week before we closed for overseeding. We ended up having to borrow a disabled Sweeper from another nearby club and between the two, got one working. Next, our fairway mower broke its frame in four different places. Then our spring rake broke down three separate times. That was followed by our top-dresser blowing one of its four rear tires. Of course, it was an inside tire and it was fully loaded with sand at the time. Add into the mix that we had nine separate 2-inch lateral waterline breaks and four 6-inch mainline breaks during the process, and you can understand the challenges.

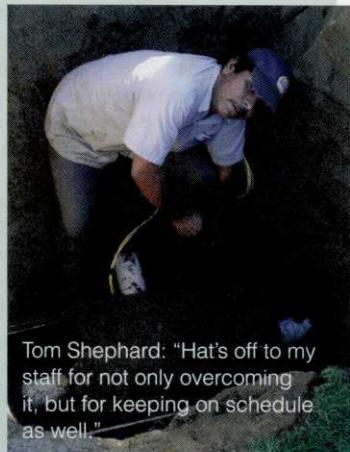
Compounding the problem, the day we finished seeding the front nine fairways and roughs, we discovered that we had a communication wire broken between our irrigation computer and the field controllers that operate the front nine watering. We had to call in a specialist who took two days to track the underground wires and find the break, which was between No. 2 green and No. 3 tee.

After everything was finally seeded and we just needed to keep the new seed wet until it germinated, we encountered a major problem. On Sunday afternoon around 1 p.m., our irrigation computer crashed – ever experience that wonderful feeling? That left us with no way to water our new seed. We contacted Rain Bird Irrigation Support and were told that the only thing that could be done was for them to build us another computer on Monday and ship it to us from Tucson, Ariz. They said we should have it sometime on Tuesday. However, we had already been watering the seed for three and a half days and it was starting to swell up, indicating that it was about ready to germinate. At this critical time we could not afford to go two or three days without water. Once the seed starts to swell, it must be kept wet or it will dry out and die.

Anyway, to make a long story short, I rushed home and got my laptop computer. Then I spent the next seven hours loading up the software and drivers to operate the system and figuring out how I could connect the laptop to the irrigation communication wires running to the controllers. This was after contacting Rain Bird again and getting permission to install and use their software on a non-Rain Bird computer. There is a key code needed to load the software.

It was a good thing we got the laptop going, because the FedEx plane had a mechanical problem and we didn't get our replacement computer until Wednesday afternoon.

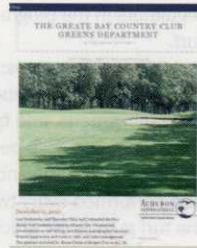
Well, everything was going great for the next three days, until one of our 100-hp irrigation pumps went down. Fortunately, we were able to adjust the irrigation computer software to operate with fewer gallons per minute and we were able to get by temporarily with one pump less. I really have to hand it to my staff because they really put forth an extraordinary effort to overcome this unique sequence of adversities.



Tom Shephard: "Hat's off to my staff for not only overcoming it, but for keeping on schedule as well."

# Ten minutes from disaster

Summer was very challenging, and Ken Thompson reminded his crew of that fact every day.



It is no secret that the summer of 2010 was one of the warmest and challenging years that I have faced in over 20 years as a golf course superintendent. Between March and September, we recorded 14 record daytime highs, 44 days over 90 degrees, and received less than 6 inches of rain from June thru August – all of it totally unprecedented! There was not a day that did not, in some new way, challenge our staff. But when it was finally over, our course had survived and was still in great shape.

I credit our success first and foremost to our staff of men and women who endured the tortuous heat to "hold" the course through hand watering. Most work days lasted over 10 hours, and were mostly spent moving from green to green, tee to tee, fairway to fairway, and rough to rough dragging 100-foot hoses.

Our staff began each day performing the basic duties of mowing and course set up. As these tasks were finished, they would then switch over to hand watering. By mid morning, our full-time staff of 10 was "on a hose" watering hot spots or syringing. As we have done since I arrived here in 2003, we only used the irrigation system when hand watering and syringing was not enough to hold the course. By the summer's end, we had hand watered for a total of 1,175 person hours.

We were most careful to not over water the greens and tees. For the greens we normally had three persons syringing – applying a very fine mist over the green with a specialized nozzle which was done to keep the surface temperatures from climbing too high. These persons were instructed to raise the nozzle up in the air instead of downwards, and to get on and off the green within the count of "7." This team was followed by my assistant or me to check each green for hot spots. In this way, only what needed water received it, while the entire green was evenly cooled down. We did a very similar program on the tees.

Our program of syringing fairways was to run a two-minute cycle during the early and mid afternoons. At the same time, a team walked each fairway and rough with hoses watering hot spots.

This program of syringing and hand watering prevented the soils from becoming wet, balanced the evapotranspiration rates, and controlled surface temperatures. It also helped with disease suppression and prevented any significant turfgrass root loss.

Some other things we did to reduce plant stress was to use solid rollers on all our mowing equipment, do our mowing in the early morning, roll greens in place of cutting them on the hottest days, raise cutting heights (by only a few 1000ths), and needle tine the greens and tees to keep the soils breathing. Over the past years we had held to an aggressive aeration program which had reduced our thatch and increased our soils pore space, contributing to having a healthy plant going into the summer.

It was a very challenging summer – and I told the staff every day that if we let our guard down we were "only ten minutes away from a disaster!" Our staff responded to the task ahead and never gave up to the heat. To them I give all the credit.

“ There was not a day that did not, in some new way, challenge our staff. But when it was finally over, our course had survived and was still in great shape.”

**KEN THOMPSON**, superintendent,  
Greate Bay Country Club, Somers Point N.J.

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