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REASONABLE MINDS

I started in this crazy business back in the Cenozoic Age as a cub reporter at GCSAA. I knew bupkis about turf, golf or – god forbid – the science that drives our industry. I was just a \$16,000-a-year newbie in a cheap suit who was hired to edit press releases, write up little news items and maybe write a feature story or two. I was completely clueless.

My first couple of days on the job were largely spent trying to figure out where the coffee maker was and how to use this amazing new technology called a “facsimile machine.” I was very proud of my Tandy 200 laptop with the tiny LCD screen and a fancy dial-up modem attachment that supposedly allowed you to transmit documents over the phone. I say “supposedly” because, as I recall, it never once worked properly. There’s a good reason the Tandy brand doesn’t exist anymore.

Anyway, I was wet behind the ears and just getting started when my office phone rang. The gentleman on the other end of the line was Dr. Houston Couch, the legendary Virginia Tech plant pathologist. He warmly welcomed me to the business and offered to be a source for any story related to turf diseases. We talked casually for 20 minutes or so before I finally asked him if there was anything specific he wanted from me. His response – which I’ll never forget – was: “Yes... if you talk to a young whippersnapper named Joe Vargas, ignore everything he tells you.”

That was my introduction to the always-interesting and entertaining world of academic disagreements. Though usually not as colorful as the great Couch vs. Vargas debate, disputes over disparate views of the finer points of turf science – particularly about the source and nature of disease pathogens – are common. They are like goose turds around ponds – unavoidable, stinky and usually invisible until you step on them.

Well, we stepped into a steaming pile a few months ago with what we thought was a relatively straightforward piece about bacterial wilt. We knew that there’d been more than a little discussion and debate about the nature of the condition, what caused it and what to

do about it, so we did a short item on the topic.

A few days after publication, I was blithely scrolling through Facebook when I noticed that our newest columnist, Dr. John Kaminski, had posted something mentioning GCI. Oh goody, I thought, how nice that John is supporting us. Wrong. In fact, the good doctor was proclaiming how bad that bacterial wilt story was and publicly saying he was thinking of resigning. I got in touch with him right away and asked why he was throwing us under the bus. I learned that, a) there was nothing factually wrong with the story... he just disagreed with some of the other PhDs we quoted, and b) he had no intention of resigning... he just wanted to be provocative to get people talking about it.

Oh...er...thanks?

(Note: Although we sincerely congratulate John on earning his tenure at Penn State earlier this month, we do marvel a bit at what he’ll be like now that he is free to do and say whatever he wishes. Be afraid people, be very afraid.)

So, once again, we find ourselves at ringside as academia’s best and brightest minds duke it out over whose theory is right. And, that’s fine because reasonable minds will differ and the debate will, we hope, eventually lead to consensus and a solution – which is all superintendents want in the first place.

So, in that spirit, we asked our associate editor Kyle Brown to dig deeper into the differing views of bacterial wilt with an eye toward finding out if any consensus is developing. It turns out that reasonable minds are beginning to agree and things seem to be coalescing around work done by (surprise!) that whippersnapper Joe Vargas.

I suspect that our deeper look at the issue will probably generate even more discussion by the “reasonable minds” of research as the apparently shallow one we did earlier. And you know what? That’s good by me because, ultimately, Dr. Kaminski was right: the more it’s talked about the sooner we’ll have real answers to the mystery condition known as bacterial wilt. **GCI**



Pat Jones
Editorial director and publisher

GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

Serving the Business of Golf Course Management

Vol. 24 No. 5

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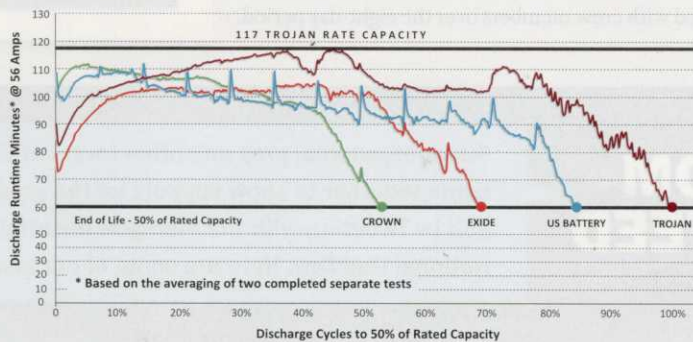




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Sharing supers



Tom Vlach, director of maintenance operations; Stadium Course

Pros come from all over the world to see TPC Sawgrass and admire the beauty of the course. A few superintendents, however, were paying as much attention to the bunkers as to the whole course.

Mark van der Linde, Johan Smit and Petri van der Walt visited the course as part of the club's exchange program to see how the course is prepared.

"They want to come before the tournament to learn what American superintendents do to get it ready for the event," says Tom Vlach, superintendent of the Stadium Course. "They wanted to see how we groomed the greens, how much verticutting we do, how much topdressing we do."

This is the second year TPC Sawgrass has hosted South African superintendents before the event. Van der Linde, of Silver Lakes Golf Estate, was the first to make the trip. This year, he traveled along with Smit, of the Observatory Golf Club and van der Walt of the Centurion Golf Course.

"They wanted to look at the big picture, setting up the event," says Vlach. "It's a different culture here than in South Africa. Here there's a lot more intensity about the crew getting into it. Our staff is very motivated."

Throughout the eight-day stay, the superintendents followed along with the team and checked out cultural practices, equipment and even the turf and ornamental plants used throughout the course. Outside the course, they bonded with crew members over the eight-day period.

There's an app for grass

Ever had a quick question about turf while out on the course, armed only with your smartphone? Rather than searching out information, check out the North Carolina State University Lawn Care app. While it's geared a little bit toward homeowners, the database includes articles from professors, researchers and staff of NCSU helpful to any member of the turfgrass industry.

The app provides local weather and alerts for weeds, insect problems and disease warnings. It can be downloaded for free from iTunes at <http://bit.ly/JsX056>.



FROM THE FEED

Superintendents, pros and other lovers of the game came together to show support for the great game of golf by Tweeting with the #iamgolf hashtag April 18, National Golf Day. Here are some of our favorites:

Why is golf more than just a game for us? Golfers are generous! We raised \$3,000 at BCC for charity for National Golf Day!!

Brooklake CC @brooklakeCC



The golf course industry provides me - and 2 million others a job and 61 billion in total wage income.

Darren J. Davis @DarrenJDavisGCS



GOLF BEHIND BARS

Getting out of prison takes a complex plan involving patience, inventive digging tools and a poster of Raquel Welch.

Or maybe just a solid golf swing.

Jeff Donahue, a L.A. County sheriff's captain, is under investigation after escorting a prison inmate from the jail on Catalina Island last summer to a local hilltop golf course. The outing wasn't exactly an escape attempt: Donahue brought along former pro golfer/jewel thief Frank Carrillo along for some tips on improving his swing and reducing his handicap, Carrillo says.

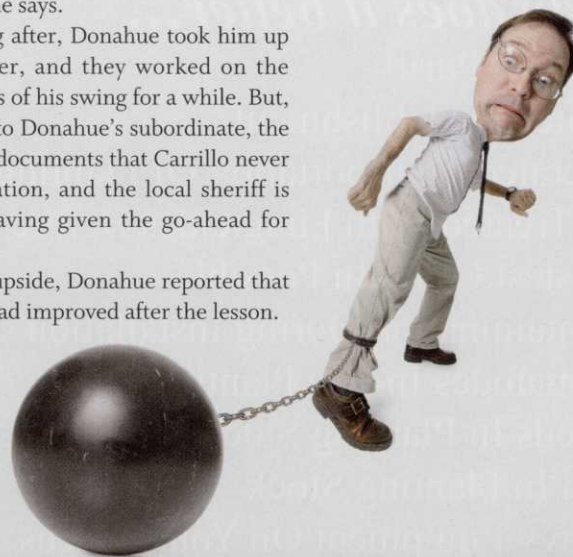
A subordinate lodged a complaint about Donahue's actions for an inappropriate relationship with an inmate, and Donahue is currently on medical leave.

After being transferred to the Catalina

prison, Carrillo found himself establishing a rapport with Donahue, and suggested they leave the prison to play some golf someday, he says.

Not long after, Donahue took him up on the offer, and they worked on the finer points of his swing for a while. But, according to Donahue's subordinate, the prison log documents that Carrillo never left the station, and the local sheriff is denying having given the go-ahead for the lesson.

On the upside, Donahue reported that his game had improved after the lesson.



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Today is National Golf Day. #iamgolf bc game teaches core values, is good exercise and enables me to spend time with my grandson.

James E. Clyburn @Clyburn



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