



“It’s amazing how skillfully and quickly superintendents can turn a storm-ravaged golf course around and make it playable again.”

MARK WOODWARD, *Contributing Editor*

Greenkeepers versus Mother Nature

When I was trimming the frost-damaged foliage from my ornamental trees and shrubs the other day, I got to thinking about what superintendents have to go through in dealing with Mother Nature.

Just a few weeks prior, at the tail end of February here in Phoenix, we had some very odd weather, and every golf course in the region was hurt by it. To give you an idea of the variety of weather we had, we went from temps in the 70s one week to a dust storm, rain, sleet, hail and high winds the next. We even saw some snow. The following week, temperatures skyrocketed to the 90s.

And it was all taking place in the Valley of the Sun — in the heart of the region’s high season for golf. The vast array

of strange weather conditions forced superintendents to determine the best management practices for their turfgrass and find a way to attract golfers to the course at what’s typically the most lucrative time of year for them.

It’s very important we in Arizona capture as much revenue as we can during these months to get us through the hot summer months, when play is down.

All of this brought back memories from my days at Torrey Pines, when we were preparing for and hosting the Buick Invitational. For two consecutive years we had a weather event. Most problematic was the wind. Many con-

cession and corporate tents were damaged when the wind picked them up and tossed them upside down. Trees were damaged, so much so that we couldn’t allow spectators in for safety reasons. It took us a few hours that morning to get all the debris cleaned up, the tents erected again and the course prepped.

In other years, we had to deal with frost delays and fog that reduced visibility to only a few yards and delayed play for several hours. These weather issues are so prevalent that the PGA Tour and the USGA actually have staff members (meteorologists) who focus on tracking weather conditions during the week of an event.

Every superintendent I know has experienced similar issues with weather. I realize this phenomenon is not

unique to me. In fact, my experiences are minimal when compared to some of you superintendents out there who have had to deal with major natural disasters, such as tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires and flooding that have caused severe damage.

Writing this column is my way of recognizing the sometimes under-appreciated skills superintendents have, particularly when things go wrong. Most superintendents do a great job under good conditions when Mother Nature cooperates. But when she doesn’t, it’s hard for us to sit back and watch as all our years of planning and preparation are destroyed in one fell swoop by a dramatic weather event that is totally out of our control.

Superintendents have become so accustomed to and adept at handling these unforeseen problems that events rarely have to be cancelled or even shortened.

Under adverse conditions, it’s amazing how skillfully and quickly superintendents can turn a storm-ravaged golf course around and make it playable again — meeting the high standards of golfers, members, the best players in the world, hundreds of thousands of spectators and millions of television viewers.

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