



THE GRASS ROOTS



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PRIVATE WEATHER CONSULTANTS

By Mike Nelson

One of the most common rules of thumb that a television weather forecaster learns is that "no matter what the current weather is, at least 50% of the public doesn't like it!" How true that is, especially in the summer months in Wisconsin. A forecaster has to be oh so careful to not inject too many personal feelings about heat, cold, rain and drought. Even though farmers (and golf course superintendents) want a good soaking rain, it inevitably occurs the same day as the big golf outing. One misplaced comment from the weather man can make him seem "unsympathetic" to local golfers. This is just one of the occupational hazards in being a TV prognosticator; our normal defense is simply, "we don't make it, we just forecast it!"

Much of the frustration that people feel with weather forecasts comes not necessarily from poorly

times precipitation, or even from inaccurate forecasts — instead I think the problem lies with poor communication. The old adage says, "if you don't like Wisconsin weather now, wait five minutes and it will change." That is true quite often, especially in the warm weather months when a fast moving squall can come and go in just a few minutes.

Because most golfers, pros and course superintendents are not in tune with weather forecasts hour by hour every day, they cannot see the evolution of the forecasts in a 12 to 24 hour period. What they rely on is what they heard at 10:00 last night, or caught on the radio this morning. I can tell you from experience that what was a clear, quiet atmosphere at 10:00 p.m. last night can turn into heavy thunderstorms by 10:00 a.m. the next morning — and it does often enough! One solution for the weather forecaster is to simply include "scattered thunderstorms" in the forecast anytime the temperature gets about 75 degrees and the dewpoint reaches 60 degrees. Unfortunately, that covers almost all of June, July and August — every single day.

People often comment that with all the satellites, computers and billions of dollars we've spent on improving weather forecasting, we should be better than we are. It is doubtful if, even with many times more money, we will ever be able to completely forecast the weather to the extent that I could say "3 days from now it will rain 1/2" between noon and 3 p.m." Our atmosphere is far too complex and fast changing to ever allow such precision.

One area where the technology

has improved, however, is on the shorter range 2 to 12 hour forecasts. In those areas, radar and satellite data can help us pinpoint thunderstorms and more accurately chart their future course. A 6 hour period can be very important for getting through a golf tournament, and a 12 hour period may mean the difference between spraying a certain herbicide or waiting for another day.

"...if you don't like Wisconsin weather now, wait five minutes and it will change."

When I am on television I am not forecasting exclusively for golf course superintendents, nor any other special interest group. Thus, within the confines of the 2 or 3 minutes I am allowed, I am not able to always cover key topics of interest to certain viewers. In addition,

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