



From the  
Director's  
Desk

From the Director's Desk

## GETTING WITH GOLF AGAIN... THE GREAT LAKES REGION IN '85

By James M. Latham, Director  
Great Lakes Region,  
USGA Green Section

There's a lot of land in the Great Lakes Region of the USGA Green Section. There's also a great array of golf courses and superintendents who maintain them. And with that mix of miles, men and means I will be forever grateful that 1985 was, for the most part, a gentle season for golf turf in this area.

First of all, the golfers started off happy — with one of the earliest, driest springs I can remember. There were no weekend rainouts. Cash flow was good. The pro shop staffs looked like toothpaste salesmen at a dentist's convention. Milwaukee actually had springlike weather when the calendar said it should. This was a first for me in 25 years here.

Superintendents, of course, have difficulties experienced by no one else in golf. The beautiful weather brought June grass growth in April with a January-size crew. The lovely southwesterly breezes dried out the unfrozen soil more rapidly than ever before and many irrigation systems weren't quite ready for the midyear stresses in May. But hold on — that was here in the flatlands. Our friends in the Dakotas and Montana were having a helluva time with spring ice problems — the kind that Jim Beard wrote classics about. Crown hydration...Dead grass...Recovery or reseeding or resodding. Like always, though, perseverance paid off and their season was successful.

In the spring, stresses also gave rise to the early appearance of the *Xanthomonas* bacterial problems

in Toronto bent. The **real** bad problem didn't surface until June or July, but what appeared to be spots from fertilizer burn early on, passed final I.D. as Decline. The range of affected greens was the range that Toronto was planted, from Indianapolis to Minneapolis in well-maintained greens on high quality golf courses. The bullet biting ranged from simple interseeding, to gassing and reseeding, to full scale rebuilding and reseeding, to the whole schmear of rebuilding with a new growing medium and all new sod.

Speaking of grasses, I think that Penneagle is getting a lot of undeserved bad mouthing. Its only sin is that we don't know how to handle it — yet. Some of us remember that Penncross got the same treatment, because it didn't perform the way Washington or Toronto or South German bents did under the high nitrogen, high cut programs then in use. Well, maybe we need to change our thinking again. There **are** some good Penneagle greens around. It makes no more sense to hang with a one pound of N per 1,000 sq. ft. per year program now than it did to stay with a six pound program earlier. But, if you don't want to change programs, don't change turf varieties. It's just that easy. Who said that new has to be better, anyway? New is only different.

The industrialists who get the blame for the international arms race are at it again except now they are working on golf courses. They put the con on clubs to begin using triplex mowers to get that 'Augusta-look' striping on fairways. This sells new mowers all around. But it's not the whole story.

The real goal of these propagandists is to get financing to develop new types of dethatching equipment and/or methods. Just think of the potential in all those acres of fairways! Then, when you get the bugs out, consider the gold in them their lawns. Golfers love THE LOOK, but when the flying iron shots starts showing up these plotters know that the superintendent will pay anything for a one-shot, one-day cure-all, whether it be animal, vegetable or mineral. We didn't reach this condition in 1985, but lightweight mowing must be counterbalanced by thatch reduc-

tion and the sooner the better.

There is one other potential problem which accelerated in 1985 — the choice of topdressing materials for greens. Just as good suppliers of high quality sands are becoming known and their products and pricing somewhat stabilized, new variables are literally muddying the water. The variable is **any** untested additive to a topdressing sand. You can have the best sand in the world and mess it up royally with a poor grade of peat. How does **your** 80/20 (or whatever mix) stack up? And who said 80/20 was good anyhow. How much silt or clay or very fine sand is in the peat? The non-capillary pores (internal drainage ways) in a Medium Sand are pretty small, so it doesn't take much mud to block them. So why pay a premium for sand if you trash it up with **any**, repeat **any**, unknown additive? This, to me, is **THE** primary problem observed in the 1985 season.

Now here are the questions **you** need to answer:

1. If I can't judge sand quality off hand, how can I judge peat quality?
2. Who **can** judge peat quality?
3. What **is** good peat quality?
4. What do I expect peat to do for me?
5. Why buy **more** trouble?

The fall of '85 was the season that balanced the Midwestern year. Rotten! It was not a time for construction. Late fall and early winter brought ice formation to some areas and prompted a major mailing from any office. December is too early for 3-inch deep ice sheets — but they are still here in mid-January, but the thaw just arrived. I hope the sprayer and fungicides are ready if this thaw cycle continues.

From my angle, I'm grateful for a pleasant 1985. There were enough problems with great variations to keep anyone busy. It was not, however, a season devoted to putting out a lot of fires so there was time to look a little deeper into basic management techniques to get a handle on the direction that Midwestern golf turf quality is heading. From where I sit this snowy January morning, the direction is true and correct if we keep our minds on the basics for program development and our eyes on

the cosmetics for people-pleasing maintenance operations. The two are indeed compatible.

These are the things that make up the lure of the Green Section today. Twenty-five years ago the work was mostly reacting to day-to-day happenstances and the swings of nature. There is much less need for this today because golf course folks are much better educated and have more sophisticated tools with which to work. Note that I did not say smarter or better equipped. Today, golfers get what some people believe are better playing conditions. They certainly tax the skill of superintendents more than ever before.

My thrill in getting back to total golf work is that with better education and much more beneficial research involvement than in the past, golf course superintendents not only recognize the real problems — soil conditions, water quality, the plants' survival capabilities and more — they are able to do something about them. The next decade should end band-aid maintenance of golf courses. I hope to be there, right in the middle of it and, hopefully, helping it happen.

## THE GRASS ROOTS IS HONORED IN SAN FRANCISCO!

The Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association was recognized for publishing the "best overall chapter newsletter" among those chapters of similar size. This is the second consecutive year THE GRASSROOTS has won an award for excellence. Editor Monroe S. Miller accepted the award at the newsletter editor's seminar. The award was also announced at the conference opening session.

There was a change in the competition categories in 1985. The number of awards was reduced to seven. Best overall — categories A, B, & C — were given, and the competition was divided in A category for chapters with less than thirty members, B category for chapters with 30 to 70 members, and the C category for chapters with more than 70

members. Additionally, four special recognition awards were made, regardless of chapter size: best flag design, best cover, best original editorial content, and best format and readability. Judging was done by a highly qualified panel of independent journalists.

The GCSAA award was based on quality and that quality reflects the excellent writing of those people who have generously given their time to this journal. Industry was well represented with articles by Ken Altorfer, Dr. Richard Hurley, Bill Keenan, Julie Nara and Dr. Tom Perkins. Our feature columnists — Dave Cookson, Ron Frame, Jim Latham, Bob Lohmann and Stan Zontek — met printing deadlines issue after issue with vital and interesting material. The University of Wisconsin — Madison faculty had a hand in earning GRASSROOTS recognition and we thank Dr. Alma Baron, Dr. Helen Harrison, Dr. Ed Hasselkus, Dr. Wayne Kussow, Dr. Jim Love, Dr. Birl Lowery, Dr. Kevin McSweeney, Dr. Emmett Schulte and Dr. Gayle Worf. Several spouses of WGCSA members — Cheryl Lange, Cheryl Miller, and Mary Worzella — cared enough to share their thoughts with our readers. WGCSA members figured prominently and put forth many interesting and educational pieces. Thanks go out to Tom Harrison, Dave Helke, Rod Johnson, Jerry Kershasky, Mark Kienert, Ric Lange, Monroe Miller, Pat Norton, Jeff Parks, Danny Quast, Bill Roberts, Mike Semler and Randy Smith. Photographic work by Ed

Devinger, Rod Johnson and Monroe Miller added greatly to the attractiveness of each issue. And very special thanks are due Gene Haas and his outstanding talent with pen and sketch pad.

Maybe deserving most credit of all is the generous group of people and companies that pay the bill for the GRASSROOTS — our advertisers. Without their support, all of the previously mentioned efforts wouldn't receive public distribution.

The unsung heroes in the process of putting this magazine in your hands are the fine staff at Kramer Printing in Madison. They really care about their craft, willingly put up with a demanding editor and work to make each issue better than the one before. Diane, Connie, Sandy and Larry are worthy of thanks from the WGCSA.

Will we stand on our laurels? No way! 1986 will be a challenge that is entirely new. Cookson, Lohmann, Latham and Worf have promised to be there again. Several new features will be forthcoming — thanks to Pat Norton, Larry Lennert, Mike Semler and Rod Johnson. Their features will each be timely and make for enjoyable reading. Our ad rates have remained stable and some refinements in layout are in the offing. Finally, this editor remains committed to publishing a magazine that accurately portrays the interesting and exciting work of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendent. It is the easiest job of all!



GRASSROOTS Editor Monroe S. Miller accepts GCSAA Award for "Best Overall Chapter Newsletter."