



A LOOK BACK AT THE DROUGHT AND SOME THOUGHTS ON BUDGETING

By David U. Cookson

Certainly this summer's drought in Wisconsin affected the playing characteristics of most of our courses, but, as one would expect, quite variably depending upon local circumstances. My own home course, on small acreage with a fairway perimeter watering system which catches much of the rough, was nearly completely green throughout the summer, while the other extreme was reflected at Bulls Eye where nearly the entire course died after the water supply from the Wisconsin River was shut off. Most courses though fared well enough except for unwatered rough, since fairway watering is now the norm throughout the state. The waterless rough did affect playability significantly however, both in increasing roll for the off line shot—which may even have been helpful in many cases—but sometimes being disastrous if the topography of the rough was hilly thereby throwing only slightly mis hit shots into areas, frequently unplayable, which golfers had not previously recognized as places to be considered in play. More than once I hit a shot to an elevated green, only barely wide of the mark, which ended up either unplayable or in a hazard by rolling at top speed off the severe slope which in normal years would have been slowed and stopped by the rough grass well short of trouble. The other effect of the drought I observed was that noticed any hot summer — over watering of our mostly *Poa annua* turf creating in some cases a muddy field of play in the midst of drought. At my club we saved grass much more completely and for a much longer period under intense stress than we ever would have in past years, when we were less cognizant of the proper use of water, by irrigating thoroughly and deeply every 5-6 days, then lightly syringing daily if signs of wilt appeared. This approach not only saved grass, but the course remained eminently playable and essentially normal throughout the drought. From a player's perspective then, if drought conditions should recur, we would prefer the Superintendent to practice

judicious use of water so that we are not playing in mud, and at the same time trying to water strategic areas of the rough by hose and sprinkler if need be so that the course continues to present itself for play as originally designed, rather than allowing unexpected and essentially unfair topographically induced results to occur from only marginally off line golf shots.

Having said all this above, I should emphasize that in general, this summer I observed a continuation and expansion of what I have perceived increasingly the past few years; that the maintenance practices of Wisconsin golf courses continue to demonstrate a high level of professional competence.

On another subject briefly; your editor has often asked me to comment upon the budgeting process from my point of view, and this is the appropriate time of year. To me, the foremost factor in presenting the budget is an honest appraisal of the costs required to maintain the golf course to your standard, backed up by a detailed analysis of the reasons behind your conclusions. If this is done, and the Board of Directors does not wish to pay for the standard of golf course maintenance you have prepared, then the burden is on them. I find though that if the Board respects the Superintendent and his abilities and judgement, they will be reluctant to cut his budget request. On the other hand, if the Board feels that the work crew is lazy or inefficient, or that the Superintendent is padding his budget because he is not precise in his calculations, they will not be inclined to accept the budgeted figures. Labor costs are the major item; and you should be able to predict nearly to the dollar what they will be by going through your yearly plan week by week, then recording how many bodies you will need or are available and thus what the costs will be. This presupposes you have planned well enough to know this, and that you are not being inefficient in labor usage. If

golfers see golf course workers standing around, the first reaction is that the Superintendent doesn't need that many workers, but at the same time, if the golf course suffers because there were not enough bodies at certain times, the Superintendent is blamed then, too. So plan your labor needs precisely, and make your budget reflect this realistically. Be sure enough is included in the budget for fertilizer and pesticides, even though you cannot plan tightly since weather is such a factor. Still, Boards do not like being surprised each year by overruns which can happen if enough is not allotted for disease control. Put in what is required, and put the burden on the Board if it denies what you feel is necessary. Lastly, carefully judge your need for capital equipment. These are high ticket items, and every effort should be made to have a predetermined yearly amount added to your budget for capital equipment that you know will be there and can be used to calculate exactly what you will purchase not only this year, but each year in the immediate future. Good planning can ensure this, and the Board should be aware of your projections. This is the only area I feel even remotely justifies a "wish list," and not an unrealistic wish list at that. If your club has a money crunch you can get by with a small delay in capital expenditures, but your yearly operating maintenance budget should be un-touchable, since these expenditures are absolutely mandatory for maintaining good quality turf. I haven't said anything new, but I know Boards respond to a good golf course well maintained by a careful Superintendent, who plans effectively and anticipates his needs and his problems. To be such, exact budgeting is imperative and basic, consequently each cost must be evaluated on its own, according to need and efficient utilization, so that everyone knows the final budget is realistic. This makes approval easy.