



THE LUCK OF THE DRAW

By Pat Norton

What part does luck, just plain old dumb luck, play in this business of golf course management?

There's no doubt that there is an element of luck involved in our work, just as there's some luck involved in everything in life. How else can one explain those days when everything clicks perfectly, when events happen to perfection, or when people do exactly what you'd expect them to do, and then some more? Sometimes it just has to be plain old good luck.

But, can a person survive, and ultimately thrive, in any field simply by relying on continual good luck? Absolutely not!

Good luck or good fortune cannot be relied upon with any degree of certainty, as any serious gambler can testify. Luck must be combined with intelligence, a strong work ethic, and a genuine concern for other people. When these and other factors are combined, then long-term success in many areas of life are more certain. This homespun, half-baked theory of mine is certainly not original. It's better known as "making your own breaks".

However, there are those times in life, and in this business, when there can be no other explanation for a turn of events other than to chalk it up to good luck.

Simple good luck for those of us who manage golf courses here in western Wisconsin. Simple bad luck for those in Wisconsin who were hit hard with ice formation this past winter, and have the turfgrass damage to show for it this spring.

For some reason Mother Nature (I refer to nature as a female because females control almost everything in a man's life) decided to smile down upon God's Country here in the west and spare us the ice storms of the winter of '92-'93. I have heard the horror stories secondhand from colleagues, but have

not seen any damage directly. We here at 'the Creek' were extremely fortunate to escape the winter without serious ice formation in our low areas, thank God! One of these years, though, it will be our turn. We have more low ground here than the Low Countries of Europe, it seems.

Members here have returned from golf outings at other locales, reporting back that other golf courses don't look so good. These people have a somewhat smug attitude about the whole thing. It is as if it is the damaged clubs' faulty management that caused the damage.

Most golfers really don't understand that Mother Nature is a very powerful force that can easily disrupt the best laid plans of any mere mortal. How else can it be explained when a superintendent observes golfers heading away from the clubhouse as a heavy duty thunderstorm bears down on the course? It's times like those when I really do wonder about the intelligence level of the average golf player.

When confronted with their ignorant comments and more ignorant attitudes, I am forced to refresh their memories concerning our ice damage from the winter of '91-'92. We had extensive damage to our roughs because of ice sheeting that lasted about three months. We were heavy duty overseeding in April 1992—WITHOUT any perennial ryegrass in our blend, I might add. If I never see perennial ryegrass on this golf course again, it'll be much too soon!

Since we have a new golf course with Penncross covering our feature areas, winter damage is not such a worry for myself and those others who have the good fortune to be managing bentgrass. I seriously doubt that I ever want to return to managing an older, established course and face the trials of managing annual bluegrass. Bent-

grass management by comparison is really a piece of cake!

Actually, a bigger worry is that our virgin bentgrass tees, greens and fairways are beginning to lose their virginity. Small spots of *Poa annua* are beginning to show up in worrisome numbers this spring, especially on the tees with their divoted voids.

Apart from our temporary woes in golfdom, consider the good fortune that we've all experienced over the years. Healthy children, supportive families, work that is usually quite enjoyable, and pretty good financial compensation are often taken for granted as we all continue to strive for that ever perfect, ever elusive golf course of our dreams.

Ice damage and turfgrass loss seem pretty minor and insignificant when compared to some of life's potential hardships. Imagine being caught in a situation in which parents could not protect their children from disease, starvation or even death. Think of the strength of spirit it would take to survive and thrive after enduring such hardships.

Think about 'the luck of the draw'. We have all turned up '21' by being fortunate enough to live in the USA and enjoy all of the benefits that this great country has to offer. Each of us has the opportunity to change our luck and improve our lot in life.

Really though, it is not a matter of luck. It's hard work, determination, clean living, and the grace of God that will ultimately permit us to reach our goals in life.

It's just that maybe God could have been a bit more merciful this past winter and kept those ice storms out of Wisconsin entirely, right guys? Keep on praying daily like we all do here in western Wisconsin—God will surely take notice and be sure to help you keep your courses green and ice damage free! 🙏