



Same Old, Same Old

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The two most common topics of discussion during Turf Advisory Service visits this season will come as no surprise to anyone: the unreliable nature of *Poa annua* and green speed. If I had a dollar for every green that lost a significant amount of *Poa* from either winter kill or midsummer heat stress, then I could probably afford a new set of Calloway woods.

Last summer, the unusually mild weather caused little if any stress to *Poa annua*. Consequently, many courses in the nine-state Great Lakes Region entered the winter with a “bumper crop” of *Poa* on greens, fairways, etc. In fact, a number of courses in the northern transition zone, central to southern Illinois and Indiana, found that the percentage of *Poa* on greens increased during the winter. This came as an unwelcome surprise to a few superintendents who had made a considerable amount of progress reducing the amount of *Poa* through overseeding programs and the careful use of plant growth regulators.

Courses in the northern portions of the region were the first to experience significant losses of *Poa annua*. “Crown hydration” and to a lesser extent prolonged periods of ice cover caused severe injury in poorly drained, low-lying areas. Perennial ryegrass practice tees were also hard hit. To make matters worse, recovery of damaged areas was very slow this spring because of the cool days and cold nights accompanied by frost — conditions that persisted well into June in some areas.

Many courses throughout Wisconsin, northern Michigan, northwest Illinois and northern Iowa were affected by winter kill. Several very highly regarded golf courses were sodding entire greens this spring. Fortunately (as if there's anything fortunate about winter kill), the damage was so widespread that the superintendents' jobs were not in jeopardy and golfers generally took the damage in stride.

There were, however, several exceptions. For instance, at one city course an old-time golfer started a petition to fire the superintendent because he had obviously poured gasoline on the greens over the winter which killed the turf!

Courses in central to southern Illinois and Indiana were hit next. The mild summer last year left the impression that *Poa annua* wasn't all that bad after all. Many courses entered the summer with a “double dose” of *Poa* in greens and fairways because little turf was lost from heat or drought last season. Well, take all the *Poa* that should have died last summer, add that to the *Poa* that would normally die this summer, and for good measure add a very shallow root system caused by heavy frequent rain this spring and you have a time bomb just ticking away.

The bomb exploded around the end of July. Frequent heavy rainfall saturated soils to a point where they became very slow to accept any more water. A heavy early morning rain followed by a sunny, very hot and humid afternoon pro-

duced ideal conditions for wet wilt in low puddled areas of greens and fairways. If the turf didn't die outright, it became very susceptible to the intense disease pressure from pythium and brown patch.

Many superintendents had already used up their fungicide budget by August and had little to show for it. Active pythium on a perennial ryegrass tee was seen at 11:00 a.m. at one southern Illinois course.

Losses of turf were sometimes blamed on more exotic problems such as “bacterial wilt” or nematodes, when simple heat stress was the more likely explanation for the injury. The take home lesson—when the going really got rough, *Poa annua* died within several days while even the older varieties of bent remained in relatively good condition in spite of the heat and humidity. Often the difference between live and dead *Poa* was adequate surface and subsurface drainage.

In contrast, the summer has been relatively mild in the central part of the region this year. Courses in Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee and Minneapolis/St. Paul have not had the intense stress and severe injury experienced farther north or south. It was difficult shifting gears between visits. After all, how sympathetic could I be to a Green Committee Chairman who is disappointed about having only 9 to 10 feet green speeds after visiting courses for two weeks that would just like to have enough grass on the greens to slow the ball down (pure algae stimps at over 12 feet when dry).

The low handicap golfers tend to judge the quality of all the greens by the conditions on the flattest, easiest green on the course. The playing conditions on the most difficult, contoured green should dictate the speed of the greens if consistent conditions between greens are desired. I know—easy to say, but very difficult to convince the better golfers who constantly compare playing conditions between courses. Of course they are often invited to play other courses when that particular course has been primed for tournament conditions. They come home assuming that all courses should double cut and rolled each day.

Roll? Did I say roll? If the greens still have grass this summer, then the golfers want to know if they can roll them.

Yes, rollers work. The green will be faster and smoother, but what is the price? The long term effects of rolling the variety of greens that exist—sand, soil, USGA, “modified” USGA, etc. etc. are not well known. Will the surface seal over? Will grain become a problem? Time will tell, but the simpler, practical problems are real and must be considered as well.

For example, faster greens have fewer hole locations. So how will concentrating the traffic into a more limited area affect the quality of turf over time? Similarly, pace of play has become a concern at many courses. Perhaps the scratch golfers can handle fast greens. But for the average

golfers, 3 and four putts can quickly transform an enjoyable 4½ hour round of golf into a 6 hour ordeal. As the saying goes, "be careful what you wish for; it may come true."

There will always be a golfer who won't be pleased until his opponent misses that downhill putt and it rolls off the green, down the fairway and out of bounds.

I haven't given up hope because the other day a Green Committee Chairman raised this question during the visit: "Wouldn't the greens be healthier if we raised the height of cut from 1/8" to 5/32" but maintained the speed and smoothness by rolling a few times a week and perhaps rolling instead of mowing on Mondays?"

Sometimes going the extra mile to communicate and educate pays off. 🌱

MINNESOTA GCSA ISSUES INVITATION TO THEIR 66th ANNUAL TURF CONFERENCE

The Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents Association is moving its 66th annual conference to the Convention Center in downtown Minneapolis and has invited all Wisconsin golf course superintendents to attend.

Their move, much like that of the WGCSA Symposium last year, was made to offer more space and the opportunity for concurrent sessions. Each session will target a particular topic and seek to thoroughly explore it from several angles. The new location also will lend itself to a very moderate fee structure. Conference registration will be on a daily, two or three day basis. The Wednesday luncheon is priced separately and is the only meal offered in an organized fashion.

The MGCSA meeting will be held on November 17, 18 and 19, 1993. Their speaker roster is excellent and includes the likes of Dr. Frank Rossi, Jim Latham, Bob Vavrek and Tom Doak. Dr. Brad Peterson from the University of Minnesota and Dr. Rod Farrentino from Cornell University are included. Others there will be Reed Mackenzie (former U.S. Open chairman), Mike Morley (Wadsworth Construction), George Carroll (Towne and Country Club), Janet Altman (OSHA), Jim Liserud (Ex. Dir., Physically Limited Golfers), Craig Waryan (PGA pro) and the USGA Green Section National Director Jim Snow. Several Minnesota golf course superintendents will discuss hosting a golf tournament. The general manager of the Minnesota Timberwolves will speak at the luncheon on Wednesday, and David McNalley will serve as their keynote speaker.

The conference includes an expanded trade show, a hospitality night at the convention center and the chance to see the Timberwolves play Friday night.

This sounds like it is going to be a great educational opportunity. For more information, call Scott Turtinen of the MGCSA at 612-473-0557. 🌱

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