



Brutal Summers Require A Little Courage and a Lot of Common Sense

By Monroe S. Miller

Usually, in most years, we all have an occasional "summer day from hell" when the hot weather and associated problems pile up to the point of being overwhelming. Not very often have we had "weeks from hell" like so many of us did this summer.

The heat of 1995 was serious stuff: grass dying is one thing; people passing away from heat indices of 120 degrees is something else entirely. It was tragic.

Course conditions are bound to suffer when the daily high for days on end goes above 90 degrees, and even 100 degrees. These are cool season grasses in the northern tier of states,

not transition or southern grasses in the sweat belt and on south. Who could be surprised they were stressed out?

Probably as stressed out as those managing them. And that grass stress dictated some decisions that may have been unpopular with players, which in turn added to the discomfort of golf course superintendents.

The weather required courage, for lots of things. Like telling a player griping about slow greens the reasons why they were slow (and then offering him the opportunity to perch and rotate on the bevel end of a stimpmeter). Slow greens on a run of hot and

humid days could have been the result of a savvy superintendent raising the height of cut. Or from the experienced decision to switch from grooved rollers to solids. Or from the wise choice of single cutting for a few days instead of the normal (at some places) of double and triple cutting.

We normally mow fairways seven days a week. But following my long held principle of "do yourself no harm" we went to the more traditional three times a week for a couple of weeks at a time, and only in the early morning.

I am baffled why, during such difficult weather, some superintendents are still double and triple cutting



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greens. It seems too risky, and I think that was probably born out this summer. Those feeling pressure to do such things have a real communication problem that they need to address with their players.

In fact, during the hottest day of the early July spell, our course looked so tough at 4:30 p.m. that I told Derek "if it was noon, I'd close the course." I am sure he was surprised, but the fact of that day was that there should not have been players out there. Closing would have helped the turf AND the golfers. Damage was as certain as it is when conditions are very wet or when frost persists.

It was too hot some days for employees, and we simply ended our

day early, once at noon. Heat related injuries and death in the news made this an easy and obvious call.

Fungicide management—distinguished from overreaction and unnecessary application—was essential for plant disease control.

The same was true for water management. We were reminded that irrigation systems only "supplement" rainfall and do a poor job of replacing it. Double row is better than single, and triple row is better than double, but no matter which, the application is uneven.

Comparison between courses is always maddening, but the extremely spotty nature of the summer rain added to the frustration. Rainfall, in

our town, varied east to west and north to south. Hand watering, judicious use of surfactants, and spot aerifying of the worst cases of isolated dry spots I've seen were necessary, despite know-it-all remarks from passing players.

We will always have weather extremes in Wisconsin; they're nothing new. The impact they have can sometimes be moderated by the way we handle them. I feel a little smarter after each one, learning in a way that will be helpful next time.

And about the time I've got it all figured out, it will be time to retire and I won't care.

Bring on the winter! 🍂

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