



Let it Snow! Let it Snow! Let it Snow!

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The end of the 1995 season could not arrive too soon for most of us across the north central tier of states. Even as the season winds down, the weather still refuses to give anyone a break. Early November snowfall that lingered for several weeks was a cause of concern for many superintendents who had not yet applied snow mold protection to greens and tees. Widely fluctuating temperatures and intermittent rain and snow during late November and early December have raised the usual battery of questions that have no definitive answers: *Should I apply an additional snow mold fungicide treatment to greens? Did the first fungicide application wash away or begin to break down? If the snow mold protection has partially broken down, when is the best time to treat the turf again—January, February, or early March? And at what rate?*

Unusual late fall weather patterns also throw the proverbial monkey wrench into the works regarding late fall fertilization and the use of protective covers.

They Don't Call It Annual Bluegrass For Nuthin'

If there was at least one hard lesson to be learned this season, it was just how quickly a stand of turf dominated by *Poa* could thin out and die under ideal conditions for disease activity and/or direct heat stress. Extensive losses of turf occurred on fairways within a matter of a few days during late July and August at a number of courses following extended periods of heat and high humidity.

Courses in Detroit and in the Twin Cities were particularly hard hit while only a few superintendents managed to avoid at least moderate losses of *Poa* that commonly occurred in high traffic areas, in poorly drained areas, or in heavily shaded areas of the course. The losses of turf had little

regard for a particular course's operating budget or its reputation.

Just about every disease known to affect cool season turf was seen at some time or another this summer. The patch diseases—brown patch, take-all patch, summer patch, and necrotic ring spot—were particularly troublesome, perhaps due to the cool weather during April and May and the early arrival of hot weather during mid-June. This limited the growth and development of a deep, healthy root system this season.

Pythium blight caused losses of turf at northern courses where the last and, perhaps, only time the superintendent had seen this pathogen was in a textbook. Turf injury associated with "high" counts of plant pathogenic nematodes were also reported from a few scattered courses in Minnesota and Wisconsin. It may be difficult to

blame losses of turf to nematodes in the northern states, however, because there is little baseline information regarding the populations of these pests in healthy turf, let alone turf under stress from a variety of other factors.

In my opinion, diseases were too often considered the primary cause of the injury to turf this summer. The pattern of injury was similar at many courses and the pattern suggests that direct heat stress, high soil temperatures, low cutting heights and other physical stresses caused more death to *Poa annua* than root pythium and crown rot anthracnose. Yes, these stresses can predispose the turf to disease infection, but I believe the weather and maintenance practices had a greater role in the quality of turf this summer than more superintendents are willing to admit. I often won-

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dered why the take—all patch only affected turf in the poorly drained, low lying portions of a green or along the clean up pass, or why nematodes only picked on the small, heavily shaded green which was also diagnosed with bentgrass decline.

Physical stress might be part of the reason why frequent fungicide applications failed to provide the usual degree of protection this summer. Some superintendents learned for the first time what superintendents in the transition zone understand very well—that under ideal conditions for disease activity, fungicides cannot provide a consistent level of protection to the turf.

In the past I made a distinction between two types of superintendents—the spikers and the rollers. Some embrace spiking, aeration, hand watering, etc. and have conditioned the golfers at a particular course to accept the temporary inconvenience of these important practices. Others embrace (often not by choice) rolling, double cutting, and heights that

approach 1/10 of an inch. This summer, the spikers usually fared better than the rollers. Intensely managed *Poa annua* was often the first to die or the first to succumb to diseases. Losses of turf, however, generally occurred in spite of sound maintenance practices, but the spikers managed to hold it together a bit longer and ran into less “golfer” problems because golfers at these courses may have more reasonable expectations compared to courses where the only criteria of putting green quality is measured by a stimpmeter.

I also learned the importance of sound irrigation management and the need for a well designed, dependable automatic irrigation system. Unfortunately, the two do not always go hand in hand. Sometimes superintendents are unable to find the “off” switch to the irrigation controllers after lobbying for over a half million dollar irrigation renovation. There were a limited number of courses that did not skip a beat this summer. A common denominator for their success was

stingy automatic irrigation and meticulous hand watering, particularly during early July when the temperatures remained well into the 90s while evapotranspiration rates were practically zero due to the high humidity.

Some superintendents could not resist watering every night even though the soil was not losing any moisture throughout the day. I don't recall any overwatered courses than managed to keep all the *Poa* alive all summer.

Maybe another designation for superintendents is in order for future reference—perhaps the “Nomads”, those parched earth, desert wanderers versus the “Sailors”, those who live on and in the water. Well, nomads and sailors will do until I think of something better. In closing, the nomads like Kevin Dushane at Bloomfield Hills Country Club and Chris Hague at Crooked Stick Country Club and others who keep the course on the dry side will continue to fare better than the sailors, like...well, you know who you are. 🌿

