



THE HEAT IS ON

By Pat Norton
Nettle Creek CC

The fact of the matter is that it's now early October down here in north central Illinois, and the heat is on...quite literally, the heat is on...to the point of being 85°F for many days running this past week!

So now we're facing a warm spell that is nothing but pure enjoyment...pure enjoyment in being outdoors every day...all day...on a gorgeous golf course that's not under any stress whatsoever!

This is beautiful growing and working weather...dusky, crisp early mornings are actually moonlit for the first hour of the work day. Then the sun warms us all up for the remainder of the day...by five or six PM a hint of evening chill is in the air, followed by enjoyable evening weather and star filled skies each night.

An open golf course like ours does have its autumn advantages. Because of its open nature, lots of the golf course can be seen in a panoramic instant. Given the fact that our course has what might be called a flat, 'prairie' look...getting up on a high greenside mound counts here for a 'blufftop vantage point'.

Our course is also extremely spread out, which makes it possible to check things out way out there about 3/4 mile away..."Hey, that little red dot in the distance is one of our guys mowing greens on the back nine...I think"...Beautiful green bent fairways wind down through the property...contrasting vividly with the colors of the changing leaves and the surrounding farm fields. Green and tee complexes look so good...so interconnected to each other because of the vivid colors.

Top off these great fall days with the unseasonably warm weather as of late and a busy aerification work schedule and it's easy to see why the weeks are flying by so quickly.

Like most golf courses, there's way too much to do and too few people available this time of year. So, in addition to the weather being so nice and warm, the heat is on in another

respect...getting finished with all of the fall cultural tasks before the weather collapses and November takes over...

Don't all golf course superintendents figure that a break from the hectic routine is in order during October? After 'busting our cans' all season long...we deserve a few weekends off during some nice weather, don't we? Do we always have to wait until the golf course closes for the season and the snow begins to fly before we can slide out of town for the weekend? If so, what a warped and inbred life we all lead!

Overall though, the degree of this heat is way mild compared to the heat of battle this past summer. I don't know much about the Wisconsin summer of '97, but we out here on the hot flatlands experienced some really dry, but very golfable weather for essentially two months stretching from mid-June through mid-August. Our roughs became dry, hard-baked wastelands during that period, while the daily battle to keep the irrigated areas fully green and functional wore us all down by the end of August.

These two months were just full of irony for our public course. The course was seriously suffering from lack of rainfall...the agronomic troops were starting to lose their resolve...while the golfers just kept coming and coming, resulting in some very happy ownership faces as they reviewed

financial figures for the summer...and as usual, the battle to keep the golf course look good...the golf staff functioning smoothly...and the golfers happy...was somewhat taken for granted!

Being taken for granted comes with this business, I think, so it doesn't do any good to complain.

So, with age comes a little bit of experience on how to deal with things when the heat is really on...and I fully realize that while it's nice to get verbal compliments on the condition of the golf course...the ultimate compliment is to have a strong membership and player base that keeps on patronizing and enjoying our golf course! A full golf course makes the heat much easier to bear...whether it's during the really hot summer months or during a most idyllic autumn...

On any golf course I've ever been at...whether as a student, and assistant superintendent, or as 'the head cheese'...the heat that's generated is almost always internal. In other words, we all put heat on ourselves to always do a perfect job, and have a perfect golf course...with too few labor and equipment resources.

The idea list...the 'to do' list...on any golf course...never gets completed...as some items on the list continue to age for lack of priority and lack of time. What's interesting about our attitudes toward these lists is that we

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view everything as very crucial, as a personal challenge to get everything completed...this week!

The real kick is that nobody else understands your priorities or your list for the golf course...nobody else on the property really knows what's going on with the golf course...if you really think about it.

Whether it's a daily, weekly, or season long thing...each and every superintendent holds the key to that great big secret out there called the golf course...and it's with some satisfaction that we're all constantly trying to explain and educate our golf professionals, owners, boards, or members as to the secrets of this great agronomic game called golf course management.

They pretend to understand or be interested...but the fact of the matter is that there is some mystery surrounding each and every beautiful golf course. People just can't understand how it is that it all stays so beautiful... even if they are really interested! Things that we all take for granted agronomically or horticultural-

ly are as foreign to them as nuclear physics is to me!

Others in my ownership group, however, cannot and do not share my zeal...nor can they be expected to...understand what all goes into making the golf course so nice and playable.

So, what often happens is that I have my daily and weekly priorities changed with just one short visit from one of the senior owners. I always tend to put the heat on myself as concerns the condition of the playing surfaces and the aesthetics of the course itself...I want that golf course out there to look as sweet as possible every day. We have a limited number of people available daily to accomplish that task, so when priorities get changed for me...on a seeming whim...the heat is really on to accomplish **everything** in a mutually satisfying and satisfactory manner!

This week, for example, we are moving out of our triple wide mobile home clubhouse and preparing for the initial phases of new...and very modest...clubhouse construction. This requires all of my people to scoot on

up there after AM chores to help with the moving out, prepping the construction site, and cleaning up the entire area...considerable man-hours spent off of the golf course... but helping out the overall situation.

Then, we look forward to Vertidrain our greens at mid-week with one of my few remaining Wisconsin connections...Wisconsin Turf Equipment...who accomplish that task at a very affordable price.

Right after that, Tyler Enterprises calls and "needs to know how soon it'll be before we're finished fertilizing our roughs with their two ton spreader"... "Heck, man, we haven't even started", I reply, "but we'll get right on that and be done by mid-morning tomorrow"...which we were!

I finish off the week by working until 2:30 p.m. Saturday...installing that 'can't wait' equipment washstand drain line with a contractor friend who certainly does not have children at home anymore...and is the type who would certainly understand it if I left for the day...but somehow I can't bring myself to leave...because he's also costing us \$65 per hour...and



TWO CROSS-COUNTRY SKIERS ARE TRAPPED IN THE FAIRWAY BUNKER ON THE 6th HOLE! **GO, PUTTER!**

we'll obviously finish the job sooner it I stay until the bitter end!

The heat is really on now...in October? Am I working my life away...consumed with my obligations at the course above all else...not caring what else happens in the world? If our employers take us a bit for granted...don't we take our spouses and families a lot for granted...for three seasons out of each and every year? Do we put too much heat on them to try and understand why they can't every go on a summer vacation...like all of their friends?

The fact is though...that there's a point beyond which any of us isn't willing to travel. When it all gets to the point of getting totally taken for granted...with no career advancement in sight...it's time to make a change. The entire employer/employee relationship has to be based on mutual respect with an understanding that most of us are capable of going on to better career opportunities. And there is definitely a point in time when each of us understands this...and decides to pursue something else in life.

I've always loved to work hard...to put in the effort to make my course look and for me to feel...successful.

I'd say that all of us have tremendous pride in what we do for a living...to the point of doing much more than is required each and every day.

This is part of the formula for success...whether in golf course management, turfgrass sales, or any other calling in life. Successful people thrive on the intense heat of living active, busy, rewarding lives...which often-times is not easy.

Easy is working forty hours per week maximum and depending on the union to keep your lazy, poor attitude butt employed...

Easy is blaming the world for your supposedly tough problems and your unhappiness...without stopping to consider how darned good you've got it all presently...not to mention the fact that numerous opportunities for a better life surround each of us every day!!

Easy is blaming the company for not giving out ever better wages and benefits without considering the fact that most people make themselves all too replaceable by virtue of their lousy work attitude and greedy behavior...

And by the way, people...good businessmen don't usually keep on

giving out raises and bonuses based solely on length of service, seniority, etc...job performance and value to the company that help lead to company profitability are the keys to a great career with any company, aren't they??

Actually for me...it's all worth it. When this golf course...this investment project is completed in about three years...Susan and I will be somewhat 'in the clover'...as my parents keep reminding us. And when I read over the GCSAA Employment Opportunities Bulletin every week...I notice that too many of them are mediocre in nature...and do not interest anymore.

So...bring on the heat...even if it is October. The end of the season is very near...and it's been a great one for almost any golf course in 1997. Too soon we'll be feverishly wishing for some of that heat...to keep our bodies warm and our minds challenged.

The cold alternative is too soon and too lastingly upon us. Then I know...I just know for certain...that I'll quickly be so sick of winter that heat...any heat...would be most welcome. 🍀

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