

Is Another Long Season at Hand?

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

I talk to a lot of people over the course of a few weeks, and nearly all of the conversations lately are of the superb golf course conditions so far in 1999. A mild winter and the early start, again, get me to wondering about the permanency of these longer seasons when you compare them to the last 25 years. Ten years ago, the thought of a putting green cut at 0.125" in April would have precipitated a call to get the guys with the white coats. Now, it is actually happening.

The weather the past couple of months, other than being quite dry in late March, has been very good. More opportunity for golf, increased green fees, and happy customers all make for good circumstances. Who'd argue?

Well, I might not argue with the good news, but I am wondering if an extended season will require some changes in our operations. Let me explain with a couple of thoughts.

It is obvious a longer season require more work; more work means more man-hours and that impacts the budget. And a longer golf season cuts down on time available for refurbishing equipment. That in turn may require us to send machines to distributors for work. They surely do good mechanical work, but my experience is we can do the same work for less.

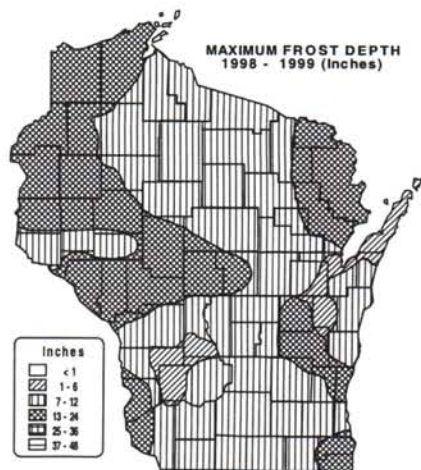
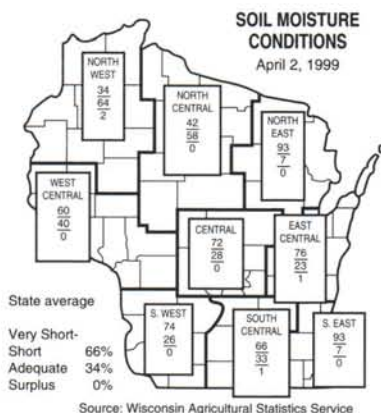
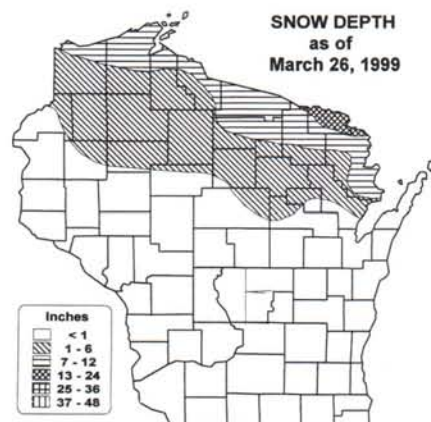
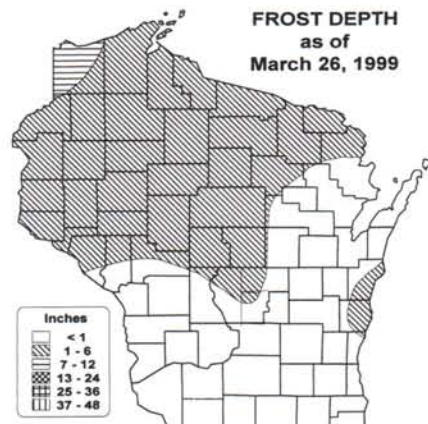
Golf is only possible because of the recovery and growth of turfgrass. There is precious little of the required growth with the cool soil temperatures of spring and the shortened day length and lower temperatures of fall. That absolutely will impact on course conditions.

An extended season likely will require an extended fungicide program which, like everything else,

costs more money. And we simply need those days of winter to work normal eight and nine hour days and to have weekends free. The extended season also shortens time available for vacations.

So, I am thinking there will be some complicating factors to these early openers and late closers that will have to be faced. It will be summer food for thought.

From the staff at the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service, who are organizing the program for the survey of the turfgrass industry in Wisconsin, here are the facts from the past couple of months, weatherwise.



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Historical Snow & Frost Depths

	Early Dec.	Mid Dec.	Late Dec.	Mid Jan.	Late Jan.	Mid Feb.	Late Feb.	Mid Mar.	Late Mar.
HISTORICAL SNOW (1961-98 and 1962-99)									
Max. Year	15.6 1985	14.7 1985	15.4 1986	21.8 1969	26.2 1979	26.1 1979	27.7 1979	24.2 1962	15.5 1962
Min. Year	0.0 1998	0.4 1998	0.6 1979	2.3 1987	1.7 1981	2.1 1987	0.4 1998	0.4 1987	0.0 S
HISTORICAL FROST (1961-98 and 1962-99)									
Max. Year	6.8 1976	12.1 1989	24.3 1989	27.1 1990	29.8 1977	34.4 1981	35.1 1968	39.8 1968	33.4 1968
Min. Year	0.0 1998	0.5 1993	2.1 1995	3.5 1992	5.2 1969	3.3 1984	1.4 1998	2.4 1998	0.8 1998

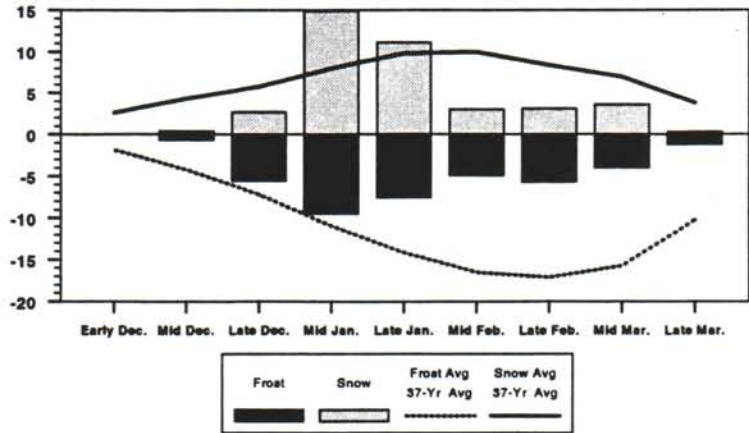
T = trace. S = two or more years.

**Wisconsin Average Precipitation
October 1, 1998 - March 31, 1999 1/**

District	Total	Normal 2/	Departure from normal	Percent of normal
Northwest	9.45	9.25	0.20	102
North Central	8.96	9.93	-0.97	90
Northeast	9.56	10.49	-0.93	91
West Central	8.99	9.14	-0.15	98
Central	7.71	10.15	-2.44	76
East Central	9.55	10.90	-1.35	88
Southwest	9.88	9.88	0.00	100
South Central	10.51	10.75	-0.24	98
Southeast	11.76	11.50	0.26	102
State	9.40	10.02	-0.62	94

1/Preliminary. 2/Normal is defined as the average for the years 1961-90. Source: Lyle Anderson, State Climatologist

**1998-99 SNOW & FROST DEPTHS
COMPARED TO THE 37-YR AVERAGE**



Weird Al "he's your pal" Gore was in town in mid-April, supposedly to take part in some non-political events on campus. Horse feathers! Everything he does is politically calculated. He is just another gasbag politician, probably better than Clinton, but not very much. And his track record indicates the potential for trouble for the golf course business if he is elected.

He is not very smart, either. I mean, really, to possess the unmitigated gall and arrogance to proclaim himself 'inventor of the Internet!' That is like the rooster taking credit for the dawn of each morning.

In the spirit of this Clinton wannabee's shameless boasting, I would like to take credit as discoverer of turfgrass. I would have preferred to lay claim for fresh air, but that was taken.

And if Al's proclamation was stunning, how about the report of a study scheduled to appear in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters* which says that the sweet scent of a freshly mowed lawn may really be the smell of air pollution.

The article claims scientists

studying the sources of chemicals in the air have found that injured grass gives off volatile compounds. "Wounding, cutting and drying of leaves and stems occur both naturally and by human activities; wound-induced and drying-induced... compounds are expected to be significant in the atmosphere. In urban areas, lawn mowing may contribute to the total... emissions and impact air quality," the report says.

After I stopped laughing, I wondered about anyone who had time to study such trivial matters when there are so many real problems facing mankind. And I also wondered who paid for such research. It reminded me of the government funded study a few years ago that warned us about the pollution dangers of cow flatulents. Serious minded people guffawed at that bit of work, knowing that in Wisconsin the concern from beer flatulents was far greater than anything the Holsteins and Brown Swiss could give us.

At our course we still depend on young people to help us prepare our course each and every day during the heart of the golf season. It

has never been particularly easy getting them to work on time and motivated to peak performance so close to daylight. But we have always managed, even though it has required the three strike rule ("if you are late three times, you are out").

A recent study claims an epidemic of sleepiness is taking a heavy toll on the nation's children and their ability to learn. Researchers were surprised that a majority of kids are sleepy during the day and 15 percent admit to falling asleep in school. They blame the lure of the Internet, TV, academic pressures, social obligations and after school jobs as factors causing sleepy students. Some are blaming biological clocks in kids for their sleepiness. And get this: some school districts are even starting later to overcome this overwhelming problem. Not surprisingly, Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D - California; you surely remember her performance during slick Willie's impeachment) introduced a bill in Congress called the "Zzzzzzz's to A's act", which gives high schools up to \$25,000 to help with the costs of a schedule change. Of course, always for some, govern-

Snow and Frost Depths, Winter 1998-99

Month	Snow Depths					Frost Depths				
	1997-98 1/		1998-99 1/		Normal 2/	1997-98 1/		1998-99 1/		Normal 2/
	Date	Inches	Date	Inches	Inches	Date	Inches	Date	Inches	Inches
Early December	12/5	1.1	12/4	0.0	2.6	12/5	0.9	12/4	0.0	1.8
Mid-December	12/19	0.7	12/18	0.4	4.3	12/19	1.0	12/18	0.7	4.2
Late December	1/2	2.1	1/1	2.7	5.8	1/2	2.7	1/1	5.6	7.2
Mid-January	1/16	8.7	1/15	14.9	8.0	1/16	6.7	1/15	9.5	10.9
Late January	1/30	9.9	1/29	11.1	9.8	1/30	6.1	1/29	7.6	14.1
Mid-February	2/13	5.7	2/12	3.0	10.0	2/13	4.3	2/12	4.9	16.5
Late February	2/27	0.4	2/26	3.1	8.4	2/27	1.4	2/26	5.7	17.1
Mid-March	3/13	2.1	3/12	3.6	7.0	3/13	2.4	3/12	4.0	15.7
Late March	3/27	0.3	3/26	0.3	3.8	3/27	0.6	3/26	1.2	10.2
Averages		3.4		4.3	6.6		2.9		4.4	10.9

1/Survey dates vary between 1997-98 and 1998-99. 2/1961-97 and 1962-98 averages.

Mean Temperature and Departure from Normal, Fahrenheit, Winter 1998-99

Location	October		November		December		January		February		March		Six months	
	Mean	D.F.N.	Mean	D.F.N.	Mean	D.F.N.	Mean	D.F.N.	Mean	D.N.F.	Mean	D.F.N.	Mean	D.F.N.
Madison	51.6	2.7	40.7	5.3	31.3	9.6	16.5	0.5	30.8	10.2	33.8	1.5	34.1	4.9
Milwaukee	54.0	3.7	43.0	5.3	32.0	7.6	20.2	1.3	32.0	9.0	34.6	1.3	36.0	4.6
Green Bay	50.9	2.9	39.4	5.0	27.4	7.2	14.8	0.5	28.3	10.0	34.0	4.0	32.5	4.8
La Crosse	53.4	3.2	39.5	3.9	29.1	8.8	14.3	-0.1	31.0	11.1	37.0	4.2	34.1	5.1
Duluth	45.9	2.2	32.1	3.7	18.7	5.9	9.7	2.7	21.3	9.0	27.9	3.5	26.0	4.4

Source: Lyle Anderson, State Climatologist. D.F.N. is the abbreviation for departure from normal. Normal is defined as the average for the years 1961-90.

Total Precipitation and Departure from Normal, Liquid Precipitation Equivalent* Inches, Winter 1998-99

Location	October		November		December		January		February		March		Six months	
	Total	D.F.N.	Total	D.F.N.	Total	D.F.N.	Total	D.F.N.	Total	D.F.N.	Total	D.F.N.	Total	D.F.N.
Madison	3.20	1.03	1.95	-0.14	0.29	-1.55	2.10	1.03	0.91	-0.17	0.47	-1.70	8.92	-1.50
Milwaukee	2.47	0.06	2.91	0.40	0.88	-1.45	4.38	2.78	0.98	-0.47	1.35	-1.32	12.97	0.00
Green Bay	1.56	-0.67	1.67	-0.49	0.30	-1.23	2.37	1.22	1.08	0.05	0.15	-1.90	7.13	-3.02
La Crosse	4.61	2.41	1.26	-0.47	0.30	-0.97	2.84	1.91	0.78	-0.12	0.61	-1.35	10.40	1.41
Duluth	4.21	1.72	3.42	1.62	1.57	0.33	0.60	-0.62	0.39	-0.41	1.38	-0.53	11.57	2.11

Source: Lyle Anderson, State Climatologist. D.F.N. is the abbreviation for departure from normal. Normal is defined as the average for the years 1961-90.

* This is the sum of both liquid precipitation (rain) and the liquid equivalent of frozen precipitation (snow, sleet, etc.).

Total Snowfall and Departure from Normal, Inches, Winter 1998-99

Location	October		November		December		January		February		March		Six months	
	Total	D.F.N.	Total	D.F.N.	Total	D.F.N.	Total	D.F.N.	Total	D.F.N.	Total	D.F.N.	Total	D.F.N.
Madison	0.0	-0.2	0.4	-3.0	2.2	-10.0	23.9	14.0	3.8	-3.3	7.8	-0.1	38.1	-2.6
Milwaukee	0.0	-0.4	0.3	-2.4	3.4	-8.0	39.0	26.1	4.4	-6.8	13.6	4.8	60.7	13.3
Green Bay	0.0	-0.2	0.3	-4.3	5.4	-7.1	21.2	9.5	2.2	-5.8	4.4	-4.8	33.5	-12.7
La Crosse	0.0	0.0	0.3	-2.6	4.1	-6.1	31.9	21.0	3.3	-4.6	5.3	-2.7	44.9	5.0
Duluth	0.0	-1.3	15.7	4.3	12.8	-3.8	18.7	1.5	9.5	-0.8	17.8	3.7	74.5	3.6

Source: Lyle Anderson, State Climatologist. D.F.N. is the abbreviation for departure from normal. Normal is defined as the average for the years 1961-90.

ment is the answer.

Here's a novel idea: put the responsibility on parents. Get kids to bed on time. Unplug the TV. Turn off the Internet. Have a curfew at home. And don't expect to use my hard earned tax money to pave the easy path.

People who manage golf courses like we do have to wonder when some goof like Rep. Lofgren will suggest golf courses move starting tee times back to 10:00 a.m. so kids don't have to get up until 8:30 a.m.

What has happened to common sense in this country?

It was a year ago at David Smith's golf course near Lake Geneva that we heard Carol McDaniel, president of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, speak about her organization and its efforts to repopulate Wisconsin with bluebirds. She was excited about the role golf courses could have in that comeback.

Well, Carol has good news to report this spring. For the first time, 10,000 Eastern bluebird nestlings flew from nest boxes in Wisconsin. That represents a 65 percent increase over the 6,000 young from 1997.

Our fair share are in those numbers. After all, bluebirds like to nest in areas where there is short grass and scattered trees, almost a perfect definition of a golf course.

Congratulations to us!

I am not a great one for watching a lot of golf on TV. It isn't exactly exciting; someone once said it is like watching paint dry. I put golf in the same excitement category as baseball.

Regardless, I try to watch a little of the Masters each year - greatest venue in the world for golf - and a little of the Bay Hill Invitational - Arnold Palmer has for almost 50 years been a genuine golf hero.

For those watching the Bay Hill

this spring, Davis Love III demonstrated why you should keep your cool on the golf course. He was mad about a buried like in the sand in a bunker on No. 17. He blasted out, 45 feet past the hole, and smashed his sand wedge to the ground. It hit a sprinkler head, water gushed out of it and washed out part of the bunker. Poor sportsmanship.

Arnie posted a bill for something like \$175,000 on Love's locker. Good sportsmanship!

The latest figures from the National Golf Foundation reporting on the supply of golf courses in the country has Wisconsin ranked 10th with 497. That breaks down to 364 daily fee courses, 73 muni courses and 60 private clubs.

We were tied for 7th in 1998 openings with 17 and ranked 9th with courses under construction as of 12/31/98 with 36.

Doug Maxwell has returned to the Plant Path Department after a couple of years in the CALS Dean's Office where he served as the executive associate dean. He will help there on one-quarter time until June 30.

Dr. Maxwell's replacement is Paul W. Ludden, a biochemist on the Madison campus.

At the same time, Dr. Margaret R. Dentine was named associate dean for research and executive director of the Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station for CALS. She has been on interim status since 1997, but now holds the permanent position. She is a geneticist by training and will administer all state and federal research funds for CALS and oversee external research support.

Hopefully we will get to see more of Dr. Maxwell now. He has been an incredibly busy person, but as you would expect, fully up to the task. Maybe now when you invite him and Martha to your course for a game of golf, they will be able to accept.

Busy days are ahead, the days that make most of us hang tough on this profession. For my part, I would like to thank my fine staff of volunteer reporters for The Grass Roots. I would be lost without them, and our journal would suffer. A 'tip o' the editor's hat' to Pete Moss, John Deere and Sandy Bunker for the work they do for the good of the game. ♣

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