



The Season Upcoming

By **Pat Norton**, Golf Course Superintendent, Nettle Creek Country Club

When a guy is battling...he simply reacts and goes. When he is stranded...and then stranded again...he has too much time to think. This past week, I had the chore, er, the opportunity to venture into the Chicago suburbs not once, but twice. Each occasion proved to be most interesting and quite educational...both on the freeway and during the seminars.

When I have to enter the traffic jungle that is Chicago...I find out rather quickly that I am somewhat of a small town bumpkin. I am not used to driving so aggressively...so I decide to adapt, react, and go! Then suddenly...there are red brake lights up ahead...demanding your immediate attention...and you find yourself stranded...and stranded again...with lots of time to think.

On the way into the suburbs...it is simply a matter of getting there...hopefully on time. My little half ton Chevy has only six cylinders...and seems like a real truck...until I go up against all of the BMWs, Acuras, monster SUVs...and the big guys with 18 wheels. After some battling and some early AM thinking...I reached my ultimate destination.

LESCO and BASF co-sponsored a really good disease control seminar on Wednesday, March 8 at Butterfield Country Club in Oak Brook. These guys don't mess around...bringing in speakers like Bruce Clarke, Joe Vargas, and our own Randy Kane and Lee Miller, of the Chicago District Golf Association. I guess that I merit an invitation due to my generally heavy purchasing from LESCO over the years...or maybe because I responded early enough. I do know that if I receive an invitation to a FREE seminar...I will certainly accept.

These fine plant pathologists all combined to provide an excellent, thought provoking series of ideas concerning fungus disease management. Of particular interest was the discussion of dollar spot...my personal nemesis. I distinctly remember spraying fairways only 3-4 apps/season during my Cedar Creek days back in beautiful Onalaska in the early 1990's. These days here in beautiful??? Morris, IL, we annually pump out six tank mix combinations...and could probably spray a 7th app in early October should the Fert&Chem budget permit.

Of particular use recently was the report that I received back from CDGA concerning DMI resistance on my golf course. As a result of submitting samples last fall...the plant doctors of the CDGA tell me that we have moderate dollar spot resistance to the DMIs. Upon scanning their report to me, I realized rather quickly that I needed to rethink my fungicide program for the season

upcoming. All winter long I resisted ordering anything on a pre-season basis as I waited for the results of our fall sampling. Their report showed that the isolates from NCCC were still very sensitive to the dicarboxamides, but moderately resistant to the DMIs. No more LESCO Spectator or Banner Maxx for me. The systemic fungicide component to be considered should be Emerald, at least for greens and tees. Excellent longevity, but very expensive. Or maybe Iprodione...at best a local systemic...whatever that means...which can be obtained these days at a very attractive price.

Lots to think about on the way home Wednesday...battling the traffic...and preparing in my mind for the upcoming season.

Then on Thursday...a return trip back upon the exact same expressway route to a Toro irrigation seminar at TPEC in Itasca, IL. Just a friendly, yet strong day-long reminder of the fact that irrigation technology has far surpassed our vintage central and field controllers. I have actually applied to put them all on the National Register of Historic Places...

During the seminar, I had plenty of time to reflect back to June 2005 when Midwest Irrigation was on our property replacing our ground rods with new copper plates. At that time they offered to replace our 16 station LTC satellites with 64 station LTC Plus satellites. These units were only one year old...and including



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labor...would have been half price as compared to new units. After many years of dealing with those older satellites...I was poised and ready to accept their offer. Alas, our owner could not be convinced of the wisdom of replacement. I regret the fact that we could not afford those replacement satellites...three years of flat or even declining revenue will make any owner skeptical about spending money impulsively.

Once again...lots to think about as I exited Toroland...wound my way back out of Chicago and headed for Corn Country USA. Down here in IlliniLand...we are making final preparations for opening our courses. We have this fantasy that once we declare ourselves to be open...golfers will flock to us...with the line of cars stretching out for miles...just like in *Field of Dreams*. I muse about all of that as I battle the flatlanders...jockeying for expressway position...then exiting onto I-80 west...and enjoying the countryside more and more as it becomes more rural.

We are having fits and starts of beautiful spring weather down here in early March. Interspersed are days and nights of beautiful stormy, rainy conditions...making me grateful that although we didn't fertilize late last fall...we did apply a nice quality greens grade 14-3-6 on our greens, tees, and fairways. Of course, this was only possible due to clearance pricing and June 1 terms...

Considered in early March...the season upcoming is always a time for excitement. It's a stretch of time in which everybody starts to reawaken and reconnect. Managers quicken their step...golfers reacquaint themselves with the club, and employees reappear for another season...looking very pale and in need of a paycheck, a bit of work...and fresh air. Discussions and decisions become much more lively and urgent...because decisions must be made and work carried out.

Like everybody, we start slowly each spring. After having completed about 75% of the winter work by March 1, we now experience a mixture of the interior and the exterior. Jake is still busy with equipment...somebody else is painting or wood-working nearby...and a couple of guys are usually making nice progress out on the course. Mr. Superintendent keeps tabs on everybody...watches the happenings up at the clubhouse...and daily sees his world and his responsibilities come back to life. The springtime golf course demands begin to stretch his managerial ability a little bit...which feels great after too many weeks of relative inactivity.

We temper ourselves...and hold back a bit...after the initial rush of new activity. The weather gets better week by week...but we know that operating



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funds right now are basically being borrowed from the bank. So we occupy ourselves with the necessities and the basics...and let our great wintertime planning ideas sort themselves out...and find their own way to the back burner. Right now, it's all about simply getting the course open...praying for some unseasonably warm weekend weather...and hoping that the telephone begins to ring...frequently.

Although it's an exciting time, I really begin now to prioritize...asking myself that were I the owner...would I expect this much spring time money to be spent so soon? Typically not. They are concerned with the basics...like cash flow and early season expense control. They don't want to be confronted with too many invoices just yet...so those improvement projects and those extra employees may have to lay dormant just a bit longer.

Speaking of the season upcoming, today I had a meeting with my favorite fertilizer sales rep. He and I have been friends for many years...during which I have bought from him at a very brisk pace. His prices are usually very good, his service is great, and his company really appreciates our business. This season, however, may be different. Over the winter I prepared a more detailed quote list than normal...in response to tightening the budget belt a bit more. The responses from eight different suppliers were quite interesting. As you might guess, some suppliers hold the line...while others are quite willing to be very aggressive on their pricing and terms. My friend today had to accept the fact that he was simply and honestly beat out...and quite badly...by more, substantially more, aggressive pricing by the bigger suppliers.

Naturally, our responsibility concerning buying for our clubs is to make the best deal possible. We must make tough, proper and ethical buying decisions. We cannot let friendship or favoritism come into play. We had better not let ourselves be bought off with points or goodies...which should separate us from our less ethical brethren who work behind the golf counters. It sickens me to witness the ease with which golf professionals and their assistants accept golf equipment and golf balls...and it amazes me that owners tolerate this in their employees.

If the golf professional owns his own shop...more power to him. He deserves all of the goodies that he can amass...hopefully to put them out for sale and enhance his business. Lots of golf professionals, though, are simply salaried managers. They are listening too much to the offers of free goodies...of being on staff with whoever...and getting yet another huge, personalized golf bag...which all amounts to basically...being bribed. I guess that they weren't listening in their Business Law & Ethics class that the PGA required them to attend. We superintendents need to

remember the lessons taught by our mentors...and not rationalize the acceptance of the points, the gifts, and the goodies.

Today also I witnessed the initial first flush of greening on the golf course. Turfgrass slowly emerges from dormancy until that decisive stretch of really nice rainfall...followed by 48-72 hours of relative heat. Over the past five days, that has been our March weather scenario. This morning dawned balmy, wet, and humid. The golf course was green! The feeling of appreciation, satisfaction, and warmth lasted for about three to four hours! Then the forecasted cold front began to slam into Illinois...to the point that I'm now typing to the warmth and the sound of my fireplace. It is an attribute to be able to adapt well to change.

All of these scenarios...are part of the beginnings of the season upcoming. It is only a matter of a few weeks until Daylight Savings Time reconnects us to the growing season...and to the golf season. Enjoy the season upcoming...and try to forget the frigid days and nights of recent weeks and months. At this point...winter is basically over. Good. Great. Send it on down to the southern hemisphere. We here in the north are going to enjoy the season upcoming. ♡



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