

Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium Why Close At All

By **David Brandenburg**, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course



The Milorganite Symposium has signaled an end to the Wisconsin Golf Season for 42 years with a great educational opportunity. Being held at Wisconsin's premier hotel the American Club in Kohler only adds the program. This year's topic, Why Close At All gave attendees many different looks at the golf industry's shoulder season from an agronomic, financial and weather perspective.

Dr. Michael Notoro, Center for Climatic Research, UW Madison, keynote address gave us an overview of how Wisconsin's climate is changing and how that could relate to the golf industry. The warming of the earth, regardless of how it is caused will bring us warmer and wetter summers with more instability and heavy rain days.

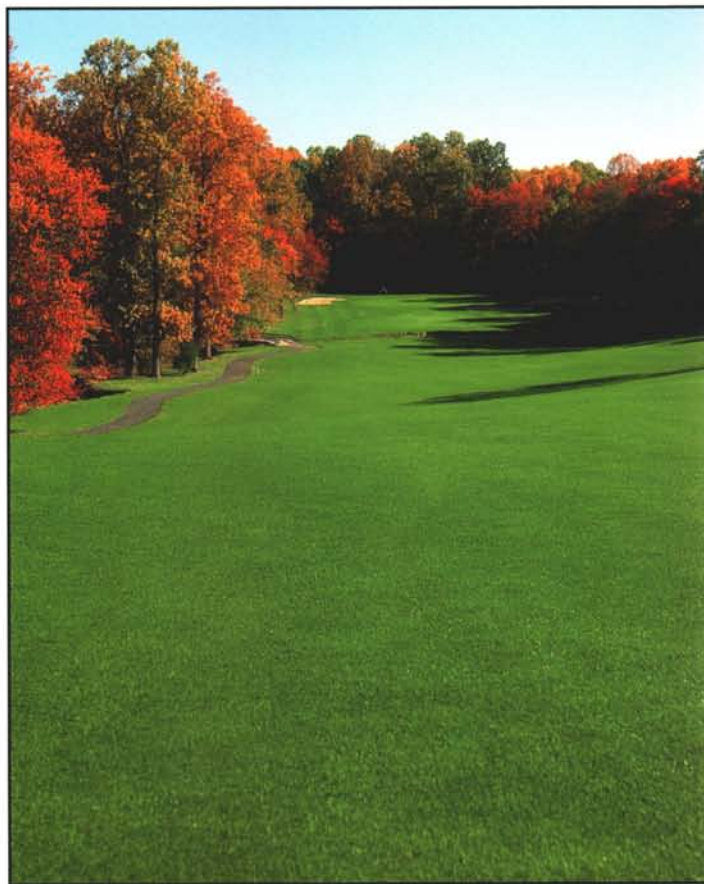
Golf in the Midwest will be affected by more days over 90 degrees reducing play and more days of heavy rain causing short term flooding. Reduced lake ice in the winter will increase evaporation reducing surface water available for irrigation.



**Jeff Hamlin of
Weather Bill.**

When considering environmental weather changes, it is difficult to compare the millions of years of earth's history to the short time golf has existed.

After we were assured our weather is changing and not necessarily for the better, Jeff Hamlin from Weather Bill spoke on how we can benefit from these changes. Weather Bill has studied how "golf playable



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days" have increased in different times of the year. A golf playable day is considered a day the temperature was between 45 and 105 with less than 1/4" of rain.

As we learned from Dr. Notaro weather is unpredictable and difficult to trend in our short time of existence. In nationwide comparisons, golf playable days have increased in 49% of US markets while they have decreased or stayed the same in 51%.

For us in Wisconsin it is clear we have more warm days, but a definite trend of increasing playable days has not been set. Besides doing research Weather Bill actually sells protection or insurance to a variety of weather related industries. The list is long and includes golf courses, movies, farming, transportation and construction to name a few.

Dr. John Stier, University of Wisconsin Madison talked on shoulder season play in a talk titled, "Should Henry Be Out There?" The easy answer is of course not, but in the business of golf it is not that easy.

Damage is not as simple as the obvious problems from compaction during wet periods or actual damage to leaf tissue during morning frosts. Much of the possibility of damage has to do with how the plants harden off for winter. Anything we do as far as mowing or allowing traffic, changes the plants growth patterns and reduces winter hardiness.

Of course Mother Nature and temperature play a huge role in plant hardiness as consistent cold temperatures do more than we can do cause a plant to harden off. Dr. Stier presented it takes until Jan or even February for turf to truly harden off.

Dr. Cale Bigelow, Purdue University presented "Contemporary Putting Green Cultural Programs that Maximize Turf Health." Cale said what many of us wanted to hear,

but are cautious of doing to avoid the ire of the customers. During stress times of summer, mowing heights need to be raised to .125 to .140. With many courses trying to maintain green speeds through the summer through ultra low mowing heights, anthracnose is near impossible to stop.

Cale also discussed root growth

and with proper organic matter content, great roots can be produced from irrigating every 4 days.

Wednesday finished with refreshments and a great time socializing with speakers and our colleges.

Darrin Batisky, Superintendent at Chartiers CC presented "High and Dry Subsurface Drainage at



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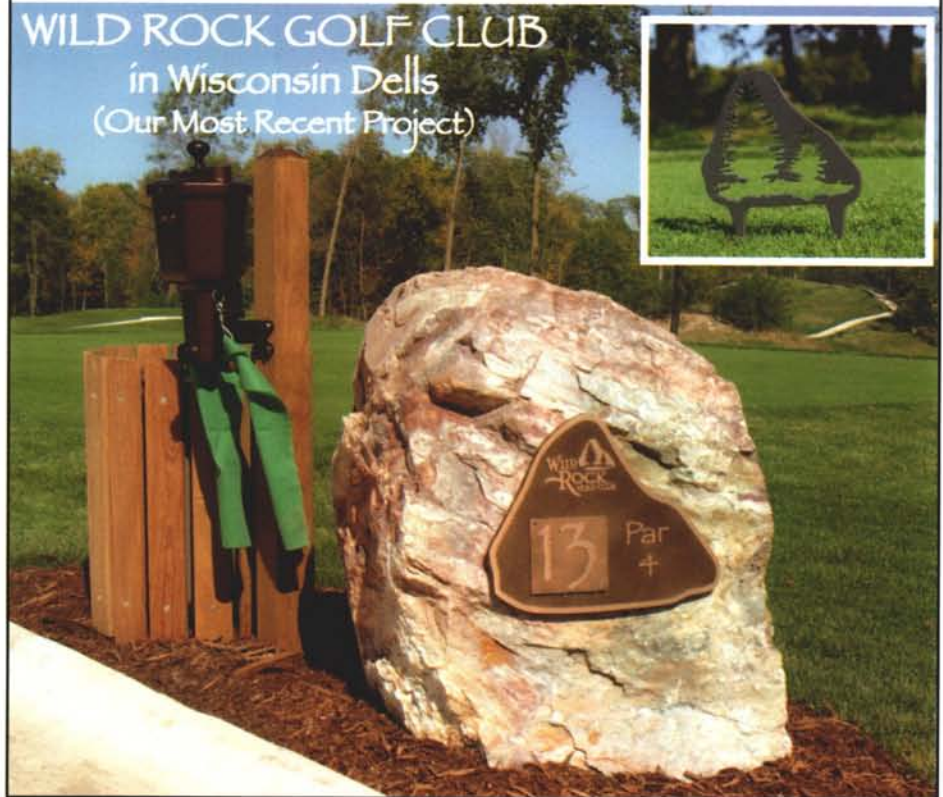
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Chartiers Country Club." Darrin started with the old adage that all politics are local so communication with members and employers is the only way to get approval for a large project.

Preliminary work included researching what other courses have done for drainage in existing greens with quick turnaround. Fortunately he found that Oakmont CC had done an internal drainage project similar to what he needed to do. Then Darrin sold the project by showing pictures of soil profiles and flooding when the greens were at their worst. It is rare the customers see the course during or right after heavy storms so the pictures were invaluable.

Some of Chartier's drainage problems were caused by development around the course causing runoff onto the greens and water seeping out of hillsides above the greens.

The project entailed having a contractor with a lot of experience and proper methods put in drain line laterals at 6' centers. A 60-20-20 greensmix worked well to match the native soil greens profile.

Anytime greens are excavated proper sod cutting, removal and re-installation is imperative. Of course tamping of the profile is a time consuming, labor intensive job that is key to success down the road.

Darrin was able to sell the project to the club with proper research and presentation. Now he can do additional problem greens because of the success he had.

Pat Jones returned to Wisconsin to entertain us with a talk titled "Re-inventing the Golf Business: Trends and Ideas Shaping the Industry." Pat is a dynamic speaker on any subject and he opened our eyes to the fact golf course superintendents no longer can just grow grass and ignore the business of golf.

Teamwork between departments is mandatory and we as managers of golf's largest cost and revenue centers must know all

sides of the golf business. Opening our department and management up to the critique and involvement of others is a risk. But if we want to succeed within our current club and have opportunities to be involved in the overall business it is a risk we must take.

After depressing the crowd with statistics about the economy of golf and the struggle to attract golfers in many markets, Pat talked about how the superintendent must be part of the overall management team and aware of how their club

attracts and keeps customers. Course maintenance practices and projects must match not only the budget but the marketing plan for the course. Who is your course trying to attract? How can the superintendent affect that?

Pat finished with some good news that although golf rounds are flat, in many businesses in today's economy flat is good. He also expressed that through the efforts of GCSAA and with individual superintendents becoming team players and leaders at their

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courses, more superintendents are being recognized as the managers of golf's biggest assets. This is a welcome change from being recongnised as managing golf's biggest cost center.

Mike Morris, Superintendent at Crystal Downs Country Club presented "Under Cover" Crystal Downs has a few "bowled" greens that do not drain in the winter season. In result every few years those greens are dead from suffocation under ice or freeze thaw damage.

Mike used Green Jacket impermeable covers over a fiber bunker liner for insulation to keep ice from freezing directly on the green surface. In changing weather it can be a challenge to pick a time and date to get the covers on because it is a time consuming practice. You have to wait for the turf to harden off a little but yet beat any freezing temps that would prevent staple installation.

Conditions under the covers were monitored with data loggers to ensure temps would stay steady. Mike's information showed with the insulating layer and impermeable cover the greens stayed a consistent temperature even during warm days or cold nights.

For Crystal Downs the covers have been successful, allowing for healthier turf and happier golfers.

David Brandenburg gave a "General Managers Perspective" covering how the GM looks at opening and closing a golf course. Many non-agronomic factors weigh into the GM's decision and not all of them are financial.

Customer service and providing what your players want is the main factor. If your players want a decent golf course every day it can be possibly open that is far different than a membership that wants perfect conditions during the four month main golf season.

David reiterated some of Pat Jones comments that the golf course superintendent no longer works by himself. He has to be part of a team and involve the other department heads in the courses long term planning.

Many superintendents with guidance from the USGA Green Section publications have developed course audits and written maintenance standards that were done with the involvement of other department managers and the greens committee. These documents provide the superintendent with a detailed job

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description and reduce outside suggestions from well minded members, chairman and other employees.

This year's panel included Bill Rogers, General Manager at Evergreen Golf Club, Mike Van Sistine, General Manager at Mauh-Nah-Tee-See CC and Kevin Paluch, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Geneva National Golf Club. The panel portion of the Symposium has historically been a great educational opportunity and this year was no exception.

Bill was a popular "enemy" as Evergreen is known for being open in the winter, causing many superintendents to explain why their course is not open to golfers on a regular basis. As Bill explained, Evergreen has the soils, property, climate and staff to handle off season golfers with little turf problems. Bill is used to getting friendly jabs from others in the business who are not as fortunate.

Bill expressed Evergreens success is based on full communication and teamwork between department heads. That is a clear reoccurring theme from the symposium speakers.

Mike expressed the importance of consistent decisions in regards to opening and closing the golf

course. Members may not always like the decision but they will respect the methods used to make it. For Mauh-Nah-Tee-See heavy soils are a major factor when the course is open or closed.

Kevin related his experiences in high level public golf and how the golf course is the customers' main concern. Geneva National uses having three courses to keep disruptive maintenance away from the customers. His records show their facility is maintaining the property later into the fall, increasing expenses but that has not related to increased revenue so far.

The Symposium Committee and Milorganite never fail in providing a great educational opportunity to end out year. Timely topics and great speakers make every years symposium a must see! 🌱



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