



# What A Spring!

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

As springs go this will go down as my worst so far and hopefully our golf courses worst ever for turf conditions. I'm not sure why but I had the feeling that our links we were in trouble way back in January. With 28 of our 30 putting greens having significant damage and 5 of them over or near 50% dead along with 25% fairway loss it has not been a fun spring. Not only did the poa annua say adios, the bents and blues also bid farewell to the golf course.

Fortunately for many of Wisconsin's golf courses the damage was limited to poa annua or select pockets. It is said that misery loves company, but in this case I am glad the severe damage was not widespread.

Why Rolling Meadows? My best guess is we must have had a snow storm in December that gave us more snow than anyone around us. Then in January when most courses melted clear we still had 20% snow cover. It is those snow-covered areas that trapped the January rains that received the damage. Couple that lush water soaked turf with the deep freeze

and more snow that followed and you have a recipe for disaster.

It seems like we had more crown hydration problems than ice damage. The greens we cleared the snow/ice off of are just as dead as the ones we did not, and the greens we put dye on to melt the ice, are just as dead as the ones we did not. The odd thing was the 2 greens that have had damage in the past were the only two perfect greens we had this spring. I believe the snow was so deep on those greens any rain was absorbed by the snow and did not sit on the surface along with the fact the surface never froze.

In a year many of us had some turf damage we hoped for an early warm spring, but that was not to be. Cold days and nighttime frosts have kept golf courses from recovering at a normal pace and have kept play down, hurting tight budgets even more. One of the few positives from the spring weather can be seen from the USDA soil moisture maps. Comparing May 4 to May 18 soils dried out nicely allowing golf course work to continue and seeding to move forward.

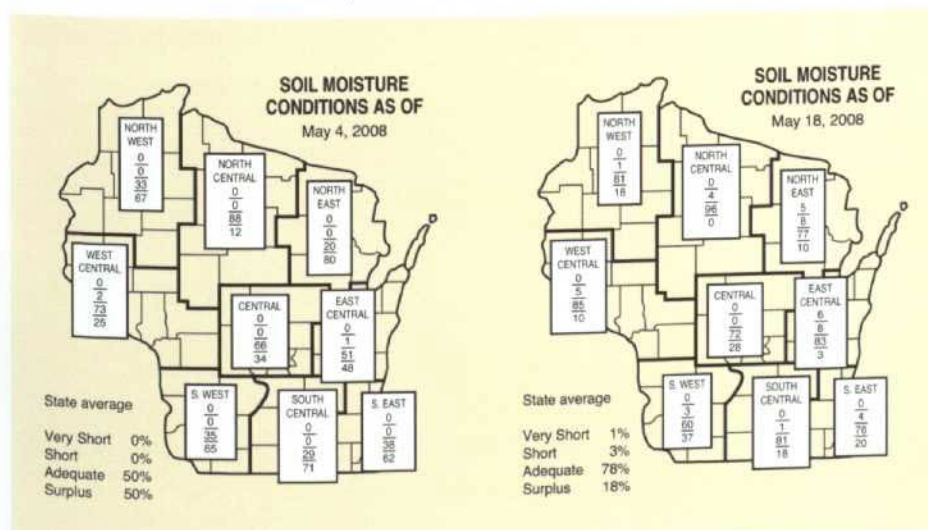
While I am criticizing the weather, allow me a minute to criticize the weatherman. I know they saying goes, don't shoot the messenger, but in recent years weather forecasts have focused on the negative and dramatic rather than the complete forecast. Just think of all those poor weather men and women doing a live shot during the local news standing out on the interstate waiting for the big storm to start. Drama in news attracts viewers, but sometimes you need common sense. Have you considered how hyped up forecasts effect the golf market or the plans you make for your staff and family?

I have obtained a copy of a letter sent by Bill Reller, Director of Operations for Madison Golf and Development Group to the Madison area meteorologists. Bill spelled out how golfers plan their golf days based on the three to five day forecast and the quick graphic they show during the news.

He gave examples of days this spring with great weather, but few golfers playing at his groups three golf courses. His research showed the forecast three days before showed rain on the graphic, but in reality the rain chance was slight.

On the other hand he made reference to days that were cold or rainy, but play was heavy because the forecast showed sun. Bill suggested that meteorologists split the day into halves and include a little more detail in the forecast. More information would allow golfers and other outside enthusiasts to make educated decisions.

It may take time and more of us to contact the meteorologists to make a real difference but in these days of





rising prices, every round of golf helps make the bottom line. At a minimum the meteorologists will become more aware of how their forecast affects business of different types in their area.

As high school finishes for the spring and our staffs are building to near full, we have the opportunity to start new goals, habits and

policies for ourselves at home and work. Most of us in this business are protective when it comes to the golf course and making sure things are as good as possible for our customers. Our jobs are affected by staff shortages, outings, player expectations, increasing paperwork and of course the ever changing weather. It is easy for a scheduled 50 hours to become 60

or even 70 a week real quick during the Wisconsin golf season.

50 I like, 60 is okay but over 60 hours a week is a lot of hours when it happens over and over again for the 5 month peak golf season. The sad thing is I know I am not alone in the golf industry working these kinds of hours. For me I have a family that is getting older and I need to get out of here and get home more often. Also, I may not believe it, but I am getting older just like all of you are. We in the golf industry need to take the time to enjoy some recreation and family time to refresh our minds once in awhile.

This is not a new concept and it is something I have pondered on for years but never took action. This year I made it part of my welcome back speech to the staff. I simply said my goal is not to be here as much. The fact I (we) work too much was reinforced after I ran into a high school friend I had not seen in 24 years. After our chance meeting we exchanged a few e-mails catching up with past stories and life histories. When comparing my golf course life to a person outside of our industry I was quickly reminded my life is too much about work and not enough about family, recreation and just having fun.

As we leave the spring rush and break into the routine of summer, each of us needs to take the time to examine what is important in our lives and enjoy the good things in life with family and friends. In other words, you don't have to go home, but don't stay here!

A new plan has been drawn up by state officials in the fight against the emerald ash borers. Many healthy ash trees in Wisconsin could escape the chain saw under a new strategy aimed at fighting this pest. The plan will be released in a few weeks as state officials adjust their response to what they see as an inevitable invasion by the destructive beetle.

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The soon to be replaced current plan, written in 2006, recommended cutting all ash trees within a half-mile of an infestation in newly found outbreaks. That could be devastating for a property that does not have the ash borer but their neighbor does. Fortunately officials have backed off of that plan to consider the use of pesticides and spot tree removal rather than blanket tree removal in outbreak areas.

This is good news for Wisconsin Golf Courses many of which are loaded with the easy to grow ash trees. It is expected that the Ash Borer will come to our state on infected firewood.

Many of us are not only feeling the pinch of high gas and oil prices effecting our budgets but the rising cost of fertilizers and other products is causing worry. The Washington DC based Fertilizer Institute points to 5 factors as effecting fertilizer prices.

1. A growing world market has increased fertilizer demand by 14% in the past 5 years. China, India and Brazil have increased their use of fertilizers for use in food crop production.
2. The increased ethanol production in the US has increased the use of fertilizer to feed the 19% increased acres of corn from 2006 to 2007. (78.3 million acres to 93.6 million acres)
3. Higher transportation costs in trucking and shipping are tied to the rising fuel prices and weather related delays in shipping patterns. Much of the fertilizer used in the United States has origins outside of our borders.
4. The weak US dollar increases the price of imported commodities. The country imports 50% of our nitrogen and 90% of our potash. (The US is the largest exporter of phosphates but that does not help us in Wisconsin where phosphates are not needed as much as other parts of the country.)
5. With ammonia being the building block for all nitrogen fertilizers and natural gas being the feedstock for producing ammonia, the cost of natural gas accounts for over 70% of the production cost of ammonia.

In the May, 2008 issue of *Golf Course Industry*, Pat Jones has an excellent article highlighting Monroe Miller called The Big Cheese Retires. Pat is a regular contributor to this fairly new publication and does an excellent job highlighting Monroe's career successes and what he stands for.

If you do not currently get *Golf Course Industry* I urge you to visit the website at [www.golfcourseindustry.com](http://www.golfcourseindustry.com) and read about our very own Mr. Miller and sign up to receive future issues. Just remember to read *The Grass Roots* first!

Congratulations to Paul Delfosse on his recent

retirement after 29 years as the superintendent and general manager at Brown County Golf Course. Brown County opened in 1957 with a Lawrence Packard design and has long been recognized as one of country's premier municipal courses.

Paul was at UW-Green Bay's Shorewood Golf Course before going to the county links. In my conversation with Paul he has adjusted well to retirement and is spending lost time doing work at his 36 acre farm. He has a couple tractors to help him if he misses the golf course days!

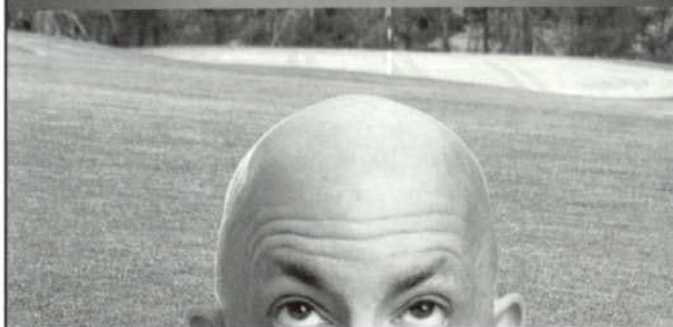
It's great to see a long time superintendent get the reward he has worked so hard for. Good luck Paul.

In closing I just want to thank all of our contributors to *The Grass Roots*. As editor they are invaluable to me and are the key to your education and enjoyment. I receive quite a few different chapter publications and *The Grass Roots* takes a back seat to none of them. You guys do a great service for the members of WGCSA. Thanks!

I will also extend an invitation to any WGCSA members or staff members who would like to contribute articles to feel free to do so.

Remember to go home and relax! The golfers do not need to see you all the time. 🌱

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