



The Dog Days of Summer?

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

By the time you read this it will be the first weeks of August and student employees would have given last day notices so they can enjoy that a couple days doing nothing before it is off to college again. The Fourth of July came so fast this year. I suppose it mainly feels that way because spring was cold and rotten up through the end of May it still feels like early summer to our internal clocks.

Outside of the one hot week in June growing grass has been fairly easy in comparison to how it can be. Of course August can bring its challenges with humid weather and hot afternoons. Hopefully everyone's

winter damage and spring flood damage is on its way to full recovery.

As challenges go I am sure many of us would trade the economy for hot and humid weather given what we know now. It is tough to entice laid off workers to play golf much less buy clubs or other equipment when they have pressing bills to pay.

According to the PGA PerformanceTrak monthly survey, median total revenue for reporting golf courses was down 3.1 percent in May from the same month in 2008. Total median revenues also were down for April (-5.9 percent) and March (-8.0 percent).

The biggest drop in May was in merchandise revenue, which fell 12.9 percent. Food and beverage revenue was down 4.3 percent and golf fee revenues dropped 4.2 percent.

For the first five months of 2009, total median revenue fell 4.6 percent, compared to the same period in 2008. Again, merchandise revenue represented the biggest loss, down 14.9 percent. Revenues for food and beverage and golf fees each fell 3.7 percent for the first five months of the year.

As revenues decreased rounds increased according to National Golf Rounds Report compiled by Golf Datatech. Rounds at U.S. golf

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courses rose in May for the third consecutive month. Rounds rose 1.4 percent in April and 3.4 percent in March when compared to a year ago. Public-course play led the way, rising 1.3 percent while private club rounds fell slightly, by 0.7 percent.

Year to date rounds are up 1.6 percent from the first five months of 2008.

Rounds information takes longer to process but weather information is already available for June. According to Pellucid's President Jim Koppenhaver, June's Golf Playable Hours (GPH) were up 1.5% for the month in comparison to 2008. The Year-to-Date (YtD) weather impact is up 1% percent vs. the same period in 2008.

The 1% increase in GPH has allowed 1% more rounds to be played YtD while less revenue is being made as courses have discounted rates to attract rounds and golfers have reduced affiliated purchases. Considering revenue pays bills and rounds do not, most operators would prefer to see increased revenue. However when push comes to shove operators are doing what they can to keep the customers coming back.

Keep in mind that the annual Super/Pro Tournament hosted by the PGA and WGCSA has been rescheduled for September 2 at Brown County Golf Course. Scott Anthes the host Superintendent / General Manager promises a great early fall day for us.

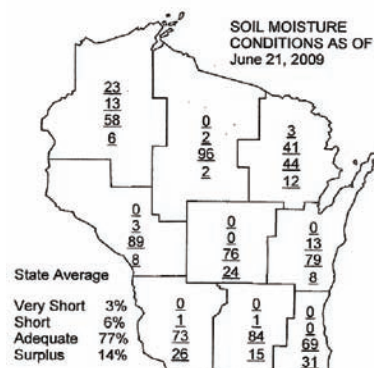
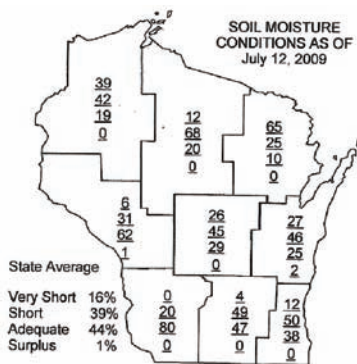
This alternate shot is a great team building event as you get to hit the Pros ball from the middle of the fairway 300 yards off the tee while he gets to hit your power fade into the woods three hundred yards from the green! Your team can sign up at www.wisconsinpga.com. If you do not have a golf professional you can play with anyone in the affiliate division.

Our weather has been odd for lack of a better term. From the

Wisconsin Crop Progress reports Soil Moisture Conditions produced by the Wisconsin Field Office of the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Office on June 21 and July 12 you can see the over half of the state is in a dry pattern with 16% of the overall state reporting very dry conditions. It appears the north-west and north east have been the driest areas over the period.

Although second crop hay is ahead of the 5 year schedule the corn and soybeans need a good rainfall followed by some warmer temperatures. Our crop is a little different but we also need some rainfall, we just don't need the warmer temperatures. I am sure the fungicide salesmen are waiting for hot and humid to return so they can move some stock and make some profit!

When it does warm up, and it will, we can take comfort in the fact the hottest average high temperatures for the year are on July 17 to the 21 and by the 22 of July the average daily high starts going down again.



Speaking of colder temperatures if your club is looking to provide recreation for your members and customers in the off season Jonathan Wiesel of Nordic Group International would be happy to help your club get started with winter activities.

Close to 100 golf courses in North America already offer formal cross-country skiing, snow tubing, snowshoeing and other winter events. If your area has the snow anyway or the ability to make snow as some clubs have done with some simple equipment purchases you may be able to produce some additional revenue for your club while keeping more staff employed during the winter season.

You can find out more information at Nordic Group's website www.nordicgroupinternational.com or by calling 303-652-1708.

Be ready for a union to come to your facility soon. In the southern states along with many municipal operations unions have been active in the golf industry for some time. New legislation proposed called the Employee Free Choice Act of 2009 (nicknamed "card check") will make organizing a union much easier for employees.

Currently when your employees want to unionize informational meetings are held and an election is held with all employees eligible for the union able to cast a private ballot. If 50.1% vote yes the union is in, and vice versa if 50.1% vote no the union is out.

Under the proposed rules signatures just have to be collected and there is no vote. Once the group has 50.1% of the workers names on a petition or card the union is in.

It opens the door to possible strong-arming and coercion towards those against the union to encourage them to vote for it. It is easy to vote your beliefs in a secret ballot but much harder when your alone with a group of pro-union employees in the

lunch room or at your house.

Currently only about 8% of the private sector (non municipal) workforce is unionized. Recent Congressional Studies have predicted card check will increase union membership by 1.5 million workers but it will also eliminate 600,000 existing jobs.

Under the proposed legislation employers have 120 days after the 50.1% is reached to come to a collective bargaining agreement with the new union. If that agreement is not reached, a federal arbitrator will come in and write a binding contract that will cover the first two years.

Regardless if you are for or against this or any legislation it reminds of us of the importance of keeping our ears to the ground about changes the affect our operations while keeping in touch with our elected officials.

One tip I have from working in the

public sector would be to keep any arguments with your elected official's fact driven and not emotional. Emotion may work at a local level but at the state and federal level facts and concise arguments carry the day.

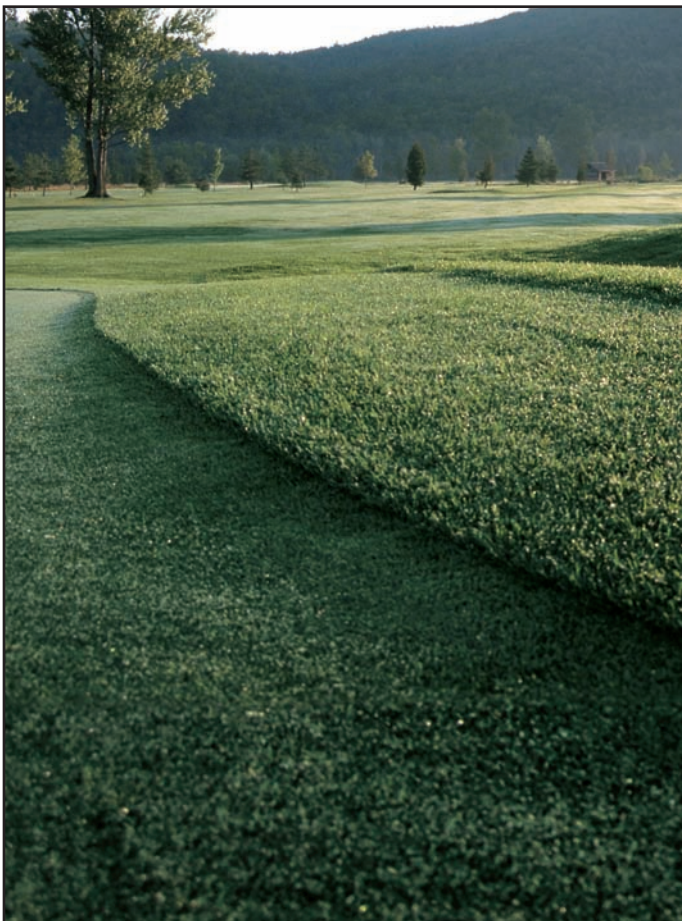
My second tip is you would be surprised how far a phone call can go to express your opinion when calling an official from your area. They actually receive very few phone calls from constituents and take all of them seriously if you have valid points.

We welcome Brett Grams as the new WGCSA Chapter Manager and wish him luck in his goals and responsibilities. Starting a new endeavor is never easy but Brett has the chapter and industry experience to succeed. Brett will be writing a regular column for *The Grass Roots* (the first one is this issue) covering the news of the association. We will feature Brett in a

personality profile next issue. Good luck Brett, you will do great.

Those of you who read last months Editors Notebook are probably wondering what is this fool going to do next! I know my mom is! To answer your burning question I did go with my daughter for tattoos for her 18th birthday, she has a heart and I decided on a cross with a crown of thorns around it on my upper back shoulder.

Not to disappoint you but the year of change has just been normal summer life for the past month. As all of you I have been busy with family and work. Often we become so busy at work we forget the one free benefit we have. Nature! Be sure to take a few extra minutes and watch the sun rise and enjoy the beauty of the properties we maintain. 🌱



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