



# Summer Learin'

By **Jake Schneider**, Assistant Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

After the summer of 2009, which was my first as an assistant, I was under the impression that growing grass during a Wisconsin summer was a walk in the park. In 2009, the temperatures were moderate, the rainfall was well-timed, and it really was kind of easy to grow grass. Fast forward to September 6, 2010, and plans for early retirement are well under way for the author.

From the beginning, it should have been obvious that it was NOT going to be year of normality. Well before the ice had fully melted from Lake Mendota's shorelines, Blackhawk opened on the second earliest date in recorded history. Because the early spring was relatively dry, we had to get our pump station primed and ready to go soon after the course opened. Unfortunately, strongly northerly winds resulted in a 5-foot-high ice shove outside of our pumphouse that had to be cleared before the intake pipe could be put in the lake. More than ever, I was none too sad about lacking enough vertical elevation to fit into our wetsuits. Thanks mom and dad! Although it seems as if it was decades ago, I'm pretty sure that the remainder of the spring was rather uneventful. Little did we know that we'd end up watering the course more in April than in June. Spring certainly was the calm before the storm(s).

Every day from June 1-August 31, it rained, the high/low temperatures were 88/70 with high humidities, and squeegeeing/pumping the "water feature" in front of our 3rd green became a daily first job. For the majority of the summer, my guess is that Paul Koch was able to save electricity at the TDL by incubating samples outside. And, while the previous sentences may be slightly embel-



**The challenge of starting the irrigation system with ice on the Lake. Notice Superintendent Chad Grimm takes the deep end.**

lished, it undoubtedly was quite the summer. For us, summer began in earnest on Thursday, July 1.

Similar to many courses, Thursday is Men's Day at Blackhawk, and on July 1, after only 3 days without rain, the course was as firm and fast as it could be. Impossibly, the *Poa* began exhibiting signs of moisture stress that afternoon, and it was all too obvious that the deep, healthy roots that we had going into the summer had gone the way of the dinosaurs. That afternoon, we were able to handwater each of the greens, besides the chipping green. Not coincidentally, the chipping green suffered significant turf loss and has yet to fully recover. The remainder of the summer was filled with handwatering greens, tees, and fairways and crash course in maintaining a predominately *Poa* course under extreme environmental and disease pressure. Granted, it could have been a lot more painful had we not made the decision to water the greens on July 1.

Although the hours were long

and the stress level was higher than preferred, the summer of 2010 will be remembered by most in many not-so-nice ways. And, while this sophomore assistant superintendent can also think of many colorful, four-letter words to describe the summer that was, it truly was a learning experience that could never be replicated in any classroom. In hindsight, being on the winning end of so many critical decisions regarding irrigation, plant protectant and fertilizer applications, etc. has provided more real world experience than I could have hoped for (literally).

Thankfully, as I write this article, the weather seems to have broken and the worst should be behind us. Last year, it seemed criminal to aerify our fairways during mid-September, but this year, Chad and I were ready to tear them up during the second week of August. Ending on the sweet note of aerifying, I hope that everyone has a terrific and relaxing fall; we deserve it. 🌱