



So You Think You Have Had Challenges

By Dr Michael J. Healy, Healy and Associates

Editors Note: Dr Healy is a turfgrass pathologist and consultant working near the Gulf of Mexico in southern Alabama. He has shared some of his interesting golf course experiences with us.

This article chronicles challenges faced by golf course superintendents working in seven different countries. Challenges include animal fending-off and tending, keeping turf alive in a severe drought, getting a course back open after a ten inch snow storm, and other significant challenges. This article is based on my travel to Korea, China, Malaysia, Oman, Turkey, The Grenadines, and Barbados earlier this year. Superintendent stories follow:

Brent Borelli- Sung Nam GC Seoul, Korea

When I landed at Seoul's International Airport in early January, as soon as I stepped outside the airport departure area door I was reminded of my growing up days west of Chicago in the middle of winter.

As I soon learned from Brent Borelli, GCS of Sung Nam GC, 25 cm (10") of snow had just fallen, with air temperatures cold enough to allow large sheets of ice to form on the Han River which courses through the center of Seoul.

While Brent's residence overlooks the Han River, the 20 minute or so drive to Sung Nam brings one to a whole other landscape. Low slung mountains with dense woods surround this 18 hole, twin greens per hole golf club. I fully expected to see at least cross



Brent Borelli on a paddle cleared greens on Sung Nam GC

country skiing, if not the downhill variety, when I was given my first tour of the course.

"So Brent", I asked, "your crew all working indoors, cleaning and painting, making repairs to equipment?". "On no" replied Brent, "virtually all our crew is on the course getting ready for golfers". "You're what?", I asked.

I soon learned that in Korea a golfing reserved tee time made is a tee time kept! Brent had already cleared all the cart paths using a snow blower attached to the front of a triplex mower. His goal now was to clean off at least one of the two twin greens per hole, along with the artificial turf areas of each natural grass tee. As no piece of equipment he had on hand was gentle enough not to destroy turf while removing snow, he had made large wood paddles. And sure enough, those paddles worked!

Of course, all the fairways and roughs still had the accumulation of snow. Later Brent confided that his crew was able to clear off landing areas on one nine. But as Brent said "Good luck if you didn't land where snow had been cleared!" His course was closed for just seven days.

Brent is a native of the U.S.

Mohamed Nizam Othman - Kuala Lumpur G & CC, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Mohd Nizam Othman has had his hands full with the recently completed total renovation of his 2nd 18 hole course which had been preceded by the complete renovation of his 1st 18 hole championship course. As both courses converted from bermudagrass to seashore paspalum, much additional care had to be taken to avoid



A view of Kuala Lumpur Golf and Country Club

bermudagrass showing up in the conversion. Even though Nizam covered all his bases regarding bermudagrass regrowth, a stringent program of finding, digging out, and replacing bermudagrass patches with seashore paspalum appears to be the final step in the process. His championship course hosts two major tournaments this year, the May Bank 2010 Malaysia Open organized by the European Tour and a combined European/Asian tour event. The 2nd 18 is now undergoing additional changes, for the hosting of the Sime Darby LPGA tournament in October.

His staff has included 80 for the golf maintenance work, and another 80 for the landscaped areas. While the most recent golf course renovation was in full swing, the club house was also undergoing a major renovation/expansion.

At the end of my tour of the then about to be completed 2nd 18 renovation, Nizam told me this course was to have a new and different living component in the course landscape. Scheduled to arrive soon will be the resident deer and peacocks! Is there any limit to the scope of golf course superintendent responsibilities?

Christine Chan- Kau Sai Chau Golf Club, Hong Kong

Christine Chan is head GCS at this 54 hole public golf course located on an island in Hong Kong Bay. No one lives on this island; the 75 golf maintenance workers, club house staff, and golfers must go back and forth by dedicated ferry boats each day.

Two of the courses are bermudagrass, with the third (and newest) being all seashore paspalum. On a clear day there are some incredibly beautiful views from nearly every hole on the island.

As I rode the course with Christine, Lee Sellars (expat American gcs and consultant) and Dr. Eric Lee (Hong Kong resident and horticultural consultant), I noticed a low slung wire fence at the outside of every cart path. "So what's the fence for?", I asked Christine.

"We have a bad problem with wild boars damaging the turf", was her reply. The boars have been on the island since day one of the golf course presence. At first



Kau Sai Chau Golf Club, Hong Kong, note the electric fence to keep the wild hogs off the tee surface.

they made excellent barbecue, but at some point they could no longer be hunted or otherwise controlled. And as wild boars breed like, well like wild boars, their numbers soon became quite large. So at night when the island is devoid of people, the wild boar population is hard at work probing the electric fence perimeters.

As we rode back to the clubhouse I noticed what appeared to be photovoltaic panels atop the golf carts below me. Christine confirmed that those golf carts were being continually recharged by the sun. I never thought to ask whether or not the same technology was used to charge the network of electric fences. Of course battery backup would be required to keep the boars at bay during nighttime hours!

Craig Hanney-Muscat Hills GC Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Is there anyone left actually living in Australia? Craig and Merryl Hanney's son Noah, at age 13, is fluent in Swiss German and becoming fluent in Arabic. The only reason he speaks English with an Aussie accent is that he's learned it from his parents- for he's never lived in Australia!

When Craig came in for the Muscat Hills grow-in and remained on at the completed course, he had a feeling he would be at the forefront of golf course turf culture there. Muscat Hills was/is the first modern design with modern turf varieties used in Oman.

He learned in a hurry that a golf course in Muscat might just react differently to local environmental conditions than elsewhere. While I won't go into detail about one of his challenges, is not a picture worth a thousand words? The photo of Craig with his trusty dog named "Pythium" should and does say it all!

Another real challenge was getting a maintenance crew up and running, motivated and efficient. Key members of his crew now include Hameed Al Balushi (from Oman), and Waseem Choudhary (originally from



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Pakistan). I fully expect both these gentlemen to someday become superintendents!

And as I've mentioned above, Craig is a native of Australia.

Atilla Demirsoy - LykiaLinks GC, Antalya, Turkey

The day I visited this course located on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea and to the east of Antalya, a fierce wind with cold rain greeted me. I thought for sure the course would be devoid of golfers, but not so. I was reminded that at Seoul, Korea's Sung Nam GC, golfers were likely now out playing on the snow covered fairways.

Atilla is one of the select group of superintendents able to claim they have successfully grown-in and maintain the only seeded variety of Seashore Paspalum used on a tee through green basis.

Atilla feels his biggest challenge and a real innovation for the area was figuring out the right technique to oversee the course at a point where golf play was at a minimum, in order to maximize rounds played and resulting revenue generated in lean economic times. He achieved this goal.

A second challenge was that blowing sand from the beach tended to accumulate on the sea-side holes. Once sand accumulation patterns were known, Atilla set about to create sand fences to prevent sand from covering turf. The final fence design and placement appears both attractive and functional. Sand fences, like snow fences, work by slowing the velocity of air borne particles to the point that they fall to the ground immediately on the leeward side of the fence.

Chris Biagi - Trump Int. GC, Canouan Island, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

All of the south Caribbean has been undergoing a year long +

drought. The last wet season (June-November) was dry with the most current dry season in its normal state.

Chris's 18 hole course has 50 acres of turf to irrigate, and another 30 acres of nonturf landscaped areas. His irrigation water sources are effluent, RO, and a fresh water reservoir, with the later two sources ordinarily supplying 45% each of his total needed minimum of 650,000 gallons per day. Recently his RO source downsized to a volume of under 20% of anticipated, and more recently his reservoir source of water went to 0%.

He's been able to keep the greens the right color and healthy, the tees are holding up, but the fairways are doing poorly. As the course was renovated a few years back to become an all seashore paspalum course, he's investigating the option of bringing in brackish water to augment his meager present irrigation supply.

Growing golf course quality turf-grass without adequate irrigation water is perhaps a superintendent's biggest challenge; adjusting management practices while introducing brackish water can be equally challenging.

Eamonn McCarthy- Barbados GC, Barbados

Barbados has not escaped the drought that has plagued St. Vincent and points south into Venezuela.

Eamonn's course is an all bermudagrass kind, and on some days he's had only 80,000 gallons of water with which to irrigate.

And during the drought, Eamonn's responsibilities were increased to include turf maintenance at the Kensington Oval, Barbados premier professional cricket stadium. While he hasn't yet needed to concern himself about the ultimate turf abuse metered out at the "pitch" area, could that be far behind?! His staff and equipment travel back and forth between the golf course and the Oval.

Eamonn is a native of Ireland.

Ed Paskins- Apes Hill GC- Barbados

Ed is overseeing another drought stricken course. He calculates his 2000 heads each get about 10 gallons of water a night; 200,000 gallons to water this very impressive all seashore paspalum course.

The fairway areas showing the most drought stress have become his testing ground for ways to minimize the drought-look along with reviving the turf to a more normal look and growth. He's hit upon using a slurry of green dye plus processed chicken manure through his hydro-mulch unit. The dye helps to mask the affected areas, while the application of organic fertilizer seems to bring the seashore paspalum growth rate back to a more normal condition.

His on-course resident animal



Many of us have extra jobs to worry about but Eamonn McCarthy at Barbados GC, Barbados, maintains the Kensington Oval Cricket Stadium.

population include the common Barbados monkey, which does no harm, and like Hong Kong, a resident population of wild hogs. He's begun installing electrified fence along with trapping the pigs. What will be the fate of the captured pigs? All I can tell you is that I ate some excellent barbecue while in Barbados.

Ed is a native of New Zealand. 🌿



Ed Haskins superintendent at Apes Hill GC in Barbados with his self designed "pig cooker"



Area of fairway at Apes Hill GC, Barbados treated with a mixture of processed chicken manure and green dye to lessen impact of drought stress

The advertisement has a green background with the text "Your PASSPORT TO PROFITABILITY" in large, stylized letters. Below this, a blue pushpin is stuck into a map of Florida, with the word "Orlando" clearly visible. A circular stamp on the map reads "GCSAA EDUCATION CONFERENCE ORLANDO, FLORIDA FEB 7-11 2011 AND THE GOLF INDUSTRY SHOW". At the bottom, it says "Visit www.gcsaa.org for more information." and includes the GCSAA logo with the tagline "Advocacy ~ Professional Development ~ Community ~ Environmental Stewardship ~ Responsiveness".

The advertisement features a red background at the top with the text "Kacy Straub Memorial Golf Tournament" and a cartoon illustration of a golfer. Below this are logos for "SALZMANN HUGHES, P.C. Attorneys at Law", "MILLENNIUM EST. 1999 MOTORS", and "RITZ & STONESIEBER CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS". The bottom half of the ad shows a black flag with a silhouette of a golfer in a red jacket and the text "ANDY NORTH 18 AND FRIENDS". At the bottom left is the "NATIONAL GOLF GRAPHICS" logo. The main text asks "Are you looking for a custom flag for that Special Event?" and explains the dye sublimation process, ending with the phone number "877-710-9363" and names "Peter or Jim".