

Potpourri Of Time And Weather

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

My 25th year as a golf course superintendent has come to an end. It seems like 15 years rather than 25. That might be because each year seems to go by faster and faster.

Thinking back there have been great years and good years and years full of challenges but I can count on one hand the number of days I did not wake up excited to go to work.

I have learned a lot about grass, golf and business but most of all about people. Of course there is plenty I do not know yet so I will not stop learning any time soon.

There is one lesson I keep learning over and over. I do not think it is because I am an idiot but because I look for the good in people and especially in employees. I need to fire faster not only for my own sanity but to improve the workplace for all the other employees who play by the rules and do a good job.

Overall in 25 years I have had great employees and have only needed to get rid of 10 or so employees but it is still a agonizing decision no matter how frustrating the employee is. Usually it is for not coming to work on scheduled days and amazingly most of the employees did good work when they did show up. As much as I agonize over the decision I feel instant relief when the employee is let go and the entire staff seems happier knowing they do not have to make up for the bad employee.

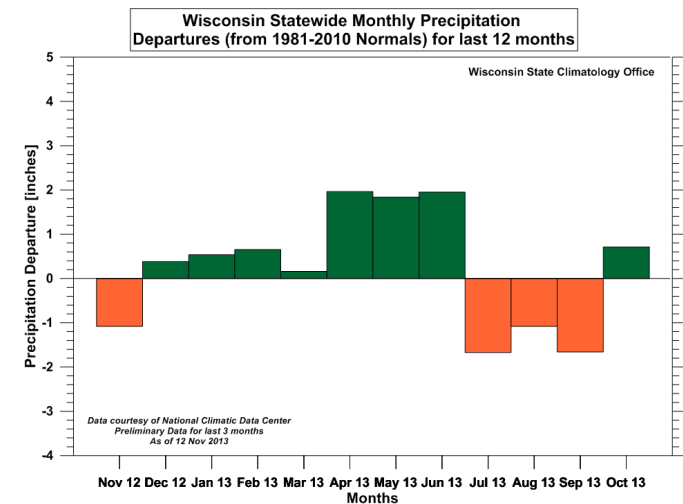
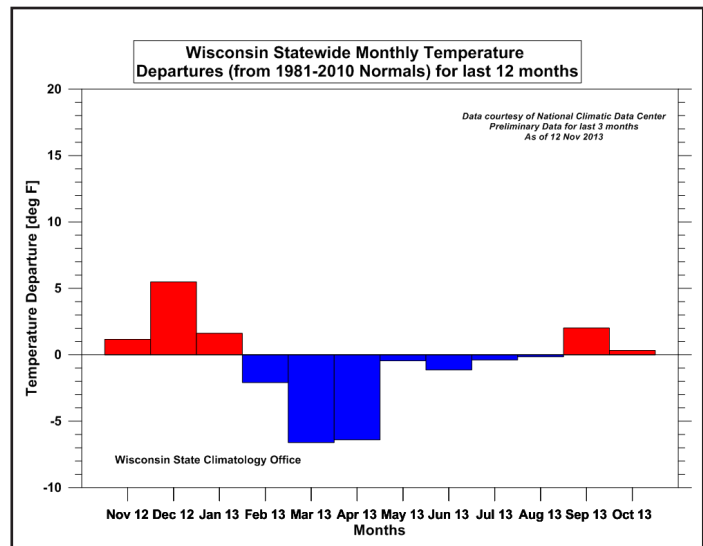
So 25 years gone and 23 to go until I retire to run a laser cutting hover mower on someone else's golf course.

This year like most offered different challenges and different weather. I suppose there is no "normal" weather and there probably

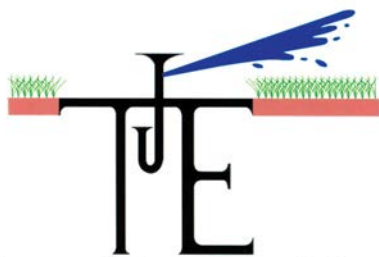
never was.

Our minds easily remember mild springs, warm summers, colorful falls and cold winters with snow from December through March. But in reality the weather is always changing and most years in the past had cold spells and hot spells and dry spells and wet spells.

For most golf courses this season ended abruptly and without complaints from the hard core golfers about staying open a couple more days. Wednesday was cool but playable and Thursday it snowed and by Saturday the ponds were covered in ice.



The National Climatic Data Center graphs show spring was cooler and wetter than the 20 year average.



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EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

With the late spring and cool fall leaves seemed to hang on later than normal so we are hoping for a few decent days without snow to mulch leaves, mark drains but I am not sure this snow is ready to melt.

The days to spray winter fungicides in November were few and far between because of wind and rain or the masses of golfers trying to get in one more round on the couple nice days. I was glad we were able to finish before the snow fell.

The days to play golf in 2013 were interfered with by Mother Nature. In Fond du Lac our season was 226 days. 41 less than 2012 and 20 less than the 4 year average.

Disappointingly we had only 163 golf playable days (45-105 degrees and less than .25" rain) which was 52 less than 2012 and 31 less than our 4 year average.

Not only did our season start later than normal on April 8th we basically tread water for 63 non-playable days.

It is likely payments from Imprellis herbicide damage have helped a lot of golf courses survive and make investments in their

properties over the past few years.

Nationally golf has a turned a corner economically but there are still areas that struggle due to less participation, rising costs and increased competition. In the past 12 months there have been at least 4 major courses throughout the state sold at a substantial discount after being foreclosed on by banks.

Fond du Lac Golf Playable Days (45 to 105 & less than .25" rain)					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	Average
March	13	0	13	0	7
April	24	15	24	11	18
May	26	27	25	20	25
June	25	23	29	20	24
July	25	23	29	27	26
August	29	29	28	29	29
September	27	23	30	25	26
October	22	23	24	23	23
November	15	12	13	8	12
December	0	0	0	0	0
Total	204.25	174.5	215	163	189

DAYS OPEN	252	237	267	226	246
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Coming Events!

Tues and Wed Dec 10th-11th, Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium, American Club, Kohler

Tuesday January 14th, WTA Turfgrass Research Day, Pyle Center, Madison

Feb 2-7, Golf Industry Show, GCSAA Conference, Orlando FL

Wednesday February 5th, Golf Industry Show Wisconsin Room 6-9pm, Brickhouse Tap, Orlando, FL

Wednesday February 17th, Assistants Seminar, Whispering Springs GC, Fond du Lac

Monday March 3rd, WGCSA Spring Business Meeting, South Hills CC, Fond du Lac

Wednesday March 5th, Northern Great Lakes Spring Symposium, Wausau (Hospitality on March 4th.)

Tuesday April 22nd, April Golf Meeting, Strawberry Creek, Kenosha

Monday May 12th, May Golf Meeting, West Bend CC, West Bend

Wednesday May 28th, Super/Pro, Fox Valley GC, Kaukauna

Monday June 23rd, WGCSA Tournament Meeting, Brown Deer GC, Milwaukee

Tuesday July 29th, UW - Summer Field Day, OJ Noer Facility, Verona

Tuesday August 11th, Joint meeting w/Northern Great Lakes Chapter, Brown County GC, Green Bay

Monday September 15th, Wee One Fundraiser, Pine Hills CC, Sheboygan

To Be Determined by WTA, WTA Fundraiser

Saturday October 4th, Couples Outing/Party, Wild Rock GC, WI Dells

Tues and Wed Dec 9th-10th, Turfgrass Symposium, American Club, Kohler

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Foreclosure is never easy for golf courses employees or customers but can bring new investment into a tired operation.

According to newspaper reports this fall will mark the end of operations for **Maple Grove Country Club** near Lacrosse and **Hudson Golf Club** in Hudson.

Hudson Golf Course opened in the 1950's and sits on 140 acres and received a lot of play from the Twin Cities area. The owners have said it is no longer financially feasible to operate as a golf course and hope to have the property rezoned from residential to commercial.

Maple Grove has been a staple of the golf community for 84 years. The course had over 1000 members in 2000 but only 100 in 2013. Maple Grove features a banquet facility that can seat 1,100, a indoor pool, tennis courts and the 180 acre golf course.

Having been through a foreclosure in a previous position I know it is a uneasy feeling and I wish the best of luck to the families and employees of struggling golf courses everywhere.

Old Hickory Golf Club in Beaver Dam has made moves to survive into the future when

the shareholder membership and board of directors voted to sell the course to a private investor.

The 193 acre course opened in the 1920's and expanded to 18 holes in 1968. According to the Beaver Dam Daily Citizen the course had 400 members in 1991 but is down to 150 currently.

A closed auction was held November 22 with only qualified bidders participating. The club had one "stalking horse" agreement to sell the club but could attempt to obtain a higher sales price through the auction.

In a move to protect the club into the future bidders had to keep the property as a golf course, honor all booked events and infuse capital to make improvements.

Although course closings will outnumber openings again in 2013 there are plans to begin a possible multi-course development 15 miles south of Wisconsin Rapids. The 1,500 acre site is being looked at by Mike Keiser who owns the 5 course Bandon Dunes complex in southern Oregon.

Keiser is expect to close on the sand covered property on December 17th and is expected to name a architect for the first 18 holes soon

after. According the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article by Gary D' Amato Madison based Oliphant Companies will build the courses.

The site features sand up to 100 feet deep and 60-80 foot sand dunes. The project should increase Wisconsin reputation as a golf destination and bring more travelers to Central Wisconsin.

In other positive golf news Rob Schultz of the Wisconsin State Journal reports that changes at the 4 Madison City Golf Courses have been well received and financially successful during the first year

Despite the poor weather the courses move to eliminate contracted golf professionals to manage their golf courses worked out and the courses turned a profit and play was up 1% through October.

With the city operating carts and concessions service and pricing has been consistent and complemented by long time customers. The Madison courses were some of the few left with cart and concessions contracted over to golf professionals. And although I am sure the pros holding those contracts worked hard to serve the golfers there comes a time too much revenue is



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EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

left on the table by the course owner and things have to change.

Despite programs to encourage family golf, junior golf, women's golf and to programs to encourage current golfers to play more our best bet for the immediate future is the baby boomers.

According to the National Golf Foundation 36 million baby boomers will reach retirement age in the next 15 years and 7.3 million of them golf. Hopes are the boomers will contribute 50 million more rounds of golf each of the next 15 years.

Best of luck to all courses and staffs as we move through this winter and have hopes for a nice spring in 2014.

Speaking of the Madison Golf Courses **Ray Shane**, Golf Programs Supervisor recently retired after 23 years of working for the city of Madison. Shane was unique in the fact he was a Class A PGA Professional as well as a Golf Course Superintendent and switched hats often during his years. Congratulations Ray!

Tom Van Valin the 32 year superintendent at Rivermoor Golf Club passed away on September 3rd. Tom is survived by his wife Pat and children Terri (Dan) Rossiter, Todd (Andrea) Calloway, and Josh (Grace) Van Valin.

Madison based **Laser Link Golf** has sold its reflector business to Prestige Flag of San Diego. Prestige will take over all manufacturing and distribution of Laser Links SmartStick, Smarty and other reflector products.

Laser link will continue the manufacture and sale of distance measuring equipment.

Eagle One Golf a manufacture and distributor of golf course products has acquired Western Golf. Western Golf products are sold to 38 countries including thousands of courses in North America.

Another year is in the books as I go to print with my 36 issue as editor. I want to thank the advertisers of *The Grass Roots* who pay for layout and printing of one of the few chapter magazines

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Steven Hammon, Golf Course Superintendent at Traverse City Golf & Country Club in Michigan has this sign posted on his driving range to educate golfers on the proper way to take divots while practicing.

According to published USGA reports the scattered method (wrong way) can take out 50% more turf than the line method (right way).

Single lines are easier to fill and heal faster than large destroyed areas.

remaining in print. We are lucky to have found a great partner in Park Printing to print, bind and distribute *The Grass Roots* to keep costs down.

I receive a number of digital only magazines and find them difficult and bulky to read. I pick the titles that interest me and ignore the rest and I believe many readers do the same if they even open the e-mail.

We are lucky to have a chapter publication we can easily find on our desks, lunch room tables or the magazine rack at home. The advertisers in these pages make it all possible so be sure to thank them for their support of your education.

A recent National Golf Foundation survey of media preferences has shown core golfers overwhelmingly prefer print golf magazines. Since most golf course superintendents got into this business because we liked to play golf it only stands to reason we prefer print as well.

I also need to thank our writers and especially the professors, students and university staff who make *The Grass Roots* worth reading. Many of the chapter publication I receive may have one educational article in them and the rest is association news. Association news is good but only when coupled with the latest research and education.

Enjoy the slower off season and I wish all of you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.