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## It Could Be Worse

By Jake Schneider, Assistant Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

Sometimes, I wonder if some of the great philosophers were responsible for maintaining golf courses during summers like we've had over the past two years. Because personally, there's something about chasing wilting Poa in 90+ degree heat during July and August afternoons that makes me question the meaning of life. Given my own deep contemplating in such situations, I can only imagine what Aristotle and Nietzsche would have come up with if they would've dealt with a Pythium outbreak or bacterial wilt. But, even though it was another extreme summer, it could've been worse.

This spring, many along the Mississippi and Missouri River watersheds dealt with flooding that seemed to drag on for months. The winterkill that we faced at Blackhawk seems like small apples when compared to the courses that either washed away or drowned when the banks overflowed. To compound the problems, many of these same areas had to deal with an extraordinary amount of tornadoes during the spring and early summer.

It almost seems criminal to complain about the heat when Oklahoma and Texas dealt with record-breaking heat and drought while we almost reached the century

mark on the thermometer. The resulting wildfires have certainly been salt on the wounds of our southern counterparts. Sure, it was hot for Wisconsin, but it wasn't that hot.

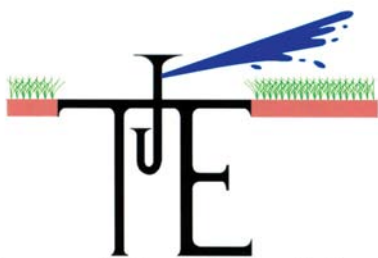
Most recently, the majority of the eastern seaboard was pummeled by the rains and winds of Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. The resulting scenes seemed like something out of Hollywood, and there's no doubt that the superintendents that had to deal with it felt the same.

So, while we most definitely had to deal with our fair share of issues in Wisconsin, there are many around the nation who would've gladly traded summers with us. Alas, as I write this article in the second week of September, fairway aeration is literally right around the corner, and it's beginning to feel a bit like fall. We've survived another summer, and I still don't know that the meaning of life is. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that I'm pining to handwater fairways any more than necessary to figure it out.

As a side note, one thing that I have figured out is that Wisconsin has lost a phenomenal professor as Dr. John Stier has taken on a new role with the University of Tennessee. John, I'm amazed by the wealth of information that my notebooks contain from the turf classes that you taught. At the time, there's no doubt that it didn't fully appreciate what you were trying to pound into my young mind. Additionally, the graduate-school opportunity that you gave me was not only tremendously rewarding, but I also like to think that it made me a much more well-rounded individual.

Dr. Stier's commitment to his students and to groundbreaking research was truly outstanding. Throughout his time in at Wisconsin, he was on the forefront of the environmental movement that's occurring in our industry, and I expect that much of his research will become even more pertinent in the coming years.

With that, I hope that everyone has a good, relaxing remainder of the fall and that you're as glad to see the summer as 2011 in the rear-view mirror as I am.



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Contact: Billie Mac Donald  
 bmacdonald@yamahagu.com  
 Office: 952-890-5541  
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RELIABILITY STARTS HERE

## How Much Challenge is Too Much?

By Jeremiah Hoffmann, PGA Golf Professional, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

If you bring up pin placements at the bar after a round of golf and you are bound to get many different opinions. Some players thoroughly enjoy brutal spots while others want them easier than easy and will still blame the pin placement for their lack of skill. The question for golf pros and superintendents alike is “Can pin placements affect people’s view of your course?” If you have a few very tough spots on a busy Saturday will it cause players think twice about coming back the next time? The answer is sometimes yes.

As you stand in the golf shop and greet players following their round, the most common complaints we hear are: “The group ahead of us was really slow” or “who made the guy that set the pins mad?”

As long as many of us have been in the business, we know that things are not nearly as bad as players make them out to be. The problem is that many times, perception is reality.

A few years ago we had a retiree who loved playing changing cups and did not understand why everyone didn’t love that one zinger per round. He would occasionally or

maybe regularly pick a difficult spot which led to more complaining than you could ever imagine. Eventually his duties were changed to include different tasks as he could not resist that urge to put one crazy pin placement on the course.

That took place at least three years ago. To this day, when a pin placement is borderline, the regulars curse this guy even though he hasn’t touched the cup changer in years!

The regular players played anticipating a bad pin placement, which took away from their enjoyment. The idea is to try and make the pin placements challenging but fair and get players around the golf course. Most players like to test their skill but hate having a ball roll off the green or roll back to them.

I’m sure many of you have heard of the “TEE IT FORWARD” campaign but maybe aren’t totally familiar with what it entails. The basic premise is that players play golf courses that are too long for their abilities. Barney Adams, founder of Adams Golf, is the driving force behind the program with substantial support from the USGA, GCSAA and the PGA. Adams asserts that if tour players had to hit the clubs into greens that most amateurs do, they would have to play a golf course approximately 8100 yards! The net result of playing a golf course that is too long is higher scores, less enjoyment, more players quitting the game or playing less often and long rounds. We cannot afford for the players that we do have to quit!



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# THE GOLF SHOP

This new campaign promotes playing a set of tees that is compatible to the distance a player can hit a driver. It's trying to help the average player get that 7, 8 or 9 iron in their hands more often. Hitting shorter clubs into greens will give players more birdie chances, help them have the opportunity to score better and ultimately play faster.

The biggest obstacle is human nature, especially the male human nature. Players often times remember that one drive that was down hill, down wind, when the ground was harder than a rock and they hit it 275. The more we can convince people to move up to a set of tees that are realistically equal to their skill set, the better the program will work.

As golf industry leaders we can help them along with course and tournament set up. Have a week that you

TEE IT FORWARD	
This chart is a guideline to help golfers align their average driving distance with the course length best suited to their abilities.	
Average Driver Distance	Recommended 18 Hole Yardage
275	6,700 - 6,900
250	6,200 - 6,400
225	5,800 - 6,000
200	5,200 - 5,400
175	4,400 - 4,600
150	3,500 - 3,700
125	2,800 - 3,000
100	2,100 - 2,300

play each color tee up a set. Offer a senior tournament and put everyone up on the senior tees. Have a red tee championship. Our seniors who are usually too proud to play the senior tees for daily play enjoy them during tournaments and a few actually switch permanently. Try and think outside the box to promote excitement and to get players enjoying themselves.

Play Golf America surveyed TEE IT FORWARD participants and found:

70% of golfers found playing more enjoyable

47% felt they played faster

91% are likely to use it again

52% stated they were likely to

play golf more often knowing they could TEE IT FORWARD

For more information on Tee it Forward, please visit [www.pga.com](http://www.pga.com) or [www.playgolfamerica.com](http://www.playgolfamerica.com).

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## We Quit - Cold Turkey!

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

Like many daily fee courses we have searched for ways to increase revenue while holding down expenses for a couple years now. Each fall around budget time it seems like a losing battle as we search for new answers and examine what worked and what did not work.

It is a twofold battle led by increasing costs and decreasing rounds. Unless you have been under the proverbial rock for the past four years you have seen costs increase across the board while revenues fall or hold steady. Fuel, fertilizer, parts, electricity and labor costs have all increased at a time every course manager wants to provide better conditions to attract new customers.

Most of us discovered that cutting costs the first couple years was easy as a few optional things could be eliminated from the program and the belt can be tightened a bit here and there without hurting. In 2011 many courses are well past the point of easy cuts and have been cutting employees and programs that are important to providing the conditions customers want with no sign 2012 will be easier.

You can only increase efficiency so many times. Employees and mowers can only go so fast while fertilizers and fungicide only lasts so long. For the 2011 budget we included cuts that really hurt but costs continue to increase while revenue stays stagnant.

I have written in a previous issue about the evils of deep discounts that rarely increase revenue for the course offering them but certainly reduce income for neighboring courses. Pretty much any day of the summer a quick internet search will find you a course offering 18 holes and a cart for \$25 or less and now that fall is here \$18 or less. A dollar per hole? It is a great deal for the player but a course cannot pay its bills on a dollar per hole.

Our course has toyed with the discounts and offers some select programs at select times. We adopted programs to provide a opportunity for our frugal customers to find a time and place to play while keeping our rack rate stable most of the time. We have avoided Golf Now and other third party tee time sites in efforts to keep our rack rate a good deal.

With a lot of angst and second guessing we did join some third party discounters to try and attract new players to our course. The goal was attract new players once at a discount show them a good time and they will come back at full price. We should have known better.

The sales pitch from the third party group is that they spend thousands in marketing, have a large database to attract "new" customers so giving their customers a discount is a win win.

Last year we joined 4 different programs and met some great new customers but found that on average the customers we received on the programs only played on the program, so they never pay full price. Good for them but not good for Wisconsin golf courses. We found they wanted discounts on their discounts and were very upset when they could not get them. ("What do you mean I can not get half price on the twilight rate?") We also saw they rarely made golf shop purchases or ate before or after their round. To make matters worse they tended to play during busy times, taking a tee time from full paying customers.

I personally know three of the four owner/operators that we worked with. They are nice guys, love the game of golf and are good at promoting their products. I wish them luck in life but I hope they find new jobs!

Why should we allow these companies to make a profit off of us? Do we have so much revenue we can afford to give it to someone else?

The other program we have tried for three years is offering customers who sign up on our website to get our e-mails a free round for their birthday. It seemed like a good idea to attract new customers and offer a round to someone who might take a cart bring a couple friends and become a regular customer.



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# THE BUSINESS OF GOLF

That happens once in awhile but for the most part the customers came alone or with someone also playing on a birthday round. It is amazing how often two golf buddies had birthdays in the same week. They usually walked but did tend to buy things. It was also a way for our regular customers to get one free round a year. A free round is nice but as a marketing tool it did not work out they way we expected.

In hindsight we found out what we already knew. We provided a number of people we will never see again rounds at our course at a discount. By July we came to our senses and declared we are done with third party discounters and birthday programs and are quitting cold turkey. No weaning off of the programs a little at a time or trying a new one. It is liberating to end a phone call with "we are not interested" 1 minute into a 5 minute sales pitch about the latest program someone looking to make a living off of daily fee courses dreams up or copies.

Instead we will continue to cater to and reward our regular customers with periodic specials and will start a new program to offer a discount card for our course only. The more you play the more you save with us.

Southwest Airline is one of the few airlines to not use

Travelocity or Expedia to offer discount fares. They offer discount fares but on their website only. They do not share their revenue with other third party vendors and are one of the few airlines making a profit. I realize that not using third party discounters is not the only reason Southwest is making money but I am convinced it is a major factor.

From now on we will begin training our customers that the one and only place to find the best price to play Rolling Meadows Golf Course is at our website. And we will not charge them extra to get it either. The purpose of the website is so customers go there and see our events list, sales items and other information to allow them to enjoy their game.

As you read this and decide what works for your course you need to realize what kind of course you offer. What does or does not work for us may or may not be applicable to your facility. We are a medium rate daily fee course in a medium sized centrally located community. The programs that did not work for us may work great for destination courses, upper level green fee courses and courses off the beaten path that truly have slow times and days.

Good luck this fall and with your budget decisions.

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## Do You Have an Alcohol Problem?

By Timothy Johnson, Equipment Manger, Bull's Eye Country Club

*Editors Note: This month we welcome a article from Timothy Johnson the Equipment Manger at Bull's Eye Country Club.*

No, I am not talking about the alcohol that you drink. I'm talking about ethanol-blended gasoline. Almost all gasoline dispensed in the United States contains 10% ethanol, referred to as E-10. Ethanol was mandated as a replacement for MTBE by the EPA, because MTBE was showing up in groundwater. Both ethanol and MTBE contain molecules of oxygen, which help reduce emissions in engines. Ethanol has certain characteristics that will cause problems in equipment used on the golf course. Ethanol normally is uniformly dissolved in the gasoline, forming a homogeneous mixture.

The problem with ethanol is that it loves water – it will absorb and hold water. In concentrations up to about 0.6%, it does not cause problems. In concentrations above 0.6%, the water and alcohol drops out of the fuel mix and goes to the bottom of the fuel tank. This is referred to as phase separation. Your engine won't run on the water and alcohol mixture that the engine is drawing from the bottom of the tank, and mixing fresh gas or additives will not restore the gasoline to usable condition. You will have to drain and dispose of the bad fuel.

Ethanol has other issues that will also cause problems. It causes softening, cracking, and swelling of rubber and plastic components. Alcohol is corrosive to metal parts, and it causes 2-stroke engines to run leaner and hotter, leading to seizure and scoring of pistons and cylinders. Ethanol is also an effective cleaning agent, scouring varnish and deposits that have sat in the fuel system for years plugging up the carburetor and filters. Some small engine manufacturers are claiming up to 75% of all problems are fuel or fuel related.

So what can you do about ethanol-laced fuel?

The easiest thing to do is buy ethanol-free fuel. I have been purchasing alcohol-free gas from my fuel supplier. The one drawback is its higher cost. There is a list of ethanol-free gas stations at [www.pure-gas.org](http://www.pure-gas.org).

If you must use E-10, there are some preventative steps

that you can take. Get rid of all fuel that was stored over the winter months in fuel cans. If your cans don't have good caps, replace them. When mixing fuel for use in 2-stroke engines, I have changed the mix ratio to 40:1 (from 50:1). The added oil in the mix lowers engine temperature, helping to prevent seizure in 2-stroke engines. Add a good fuel-stabilizer to your gasoline. I have used Sea Foam, Star Tron, and STA-BIL with good success. Be aware that STA-BIL makes a marine formula for use with ethanol fuels.

If you are going to store your engines, I would recommend draining the fuel tank and running the engine until it stops, and then fogging the inside of the fuel tank and cylinder for engines that will be stored longer than a month.

Warning – running a generator with a load until it stops can cause the field to become de-energized. If you can't run your equipment dry, fill the tank full and add fuel stabilizer to the fuel. Try to start your engines monthly and run them a little bit, and then hope for the best. If you have carburetor problems, you generally will have better success replacing the carburetor rather than rebuilding, due to the corrosion you will find, plus many manufacturers have reduced the price of new carburetors to the point that it doesn't pay to rebuild them.

There are also companies that offer canned fuel. The fuel, oil and stabilizers are pre-blended and the fuel is alcohol-free, resulting in a 2+ year shelf life after opening the can. I have not used these, but it might be a good strategy for units like sod cutters and other infrequently used pieces. Fuel storage tanks can be another area of concern. I have been using a water separator filter (10 microns or better) to stop the problem at the source.

So What's Next?

Now that you see that ethanol-blended gasoline can cause problems, I have more bad news. It is going to get worse. In October 2010, the EPA made a decision to increase the amount of ethanol to 15%. While E-15 fuel is safe for 2001 and newer model vehicles, it is not safe for older cars, non-road and small engine equipment. There have been lawsuits filed in U.S. courts fighting the EPA's decision to use E-15 blended fuels. Even if E-15 mandate gets stopped, E-10 and all its associated problems are still here.



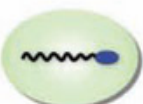


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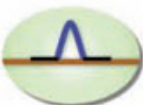
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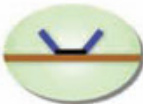
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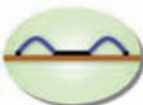
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## Tick, Tock, Tick, Tock

By Robert Vavrek, United States Golf Association, Senior Agronomist, North Central Region

*Editors Note: This article was originally printed in the USGA Green Section Record September 16, 2011, and is reprinted here with permission.*

Time is running out, along with daylight and high soil temperatures, for those still trying to recover from the turf losses caused by this summer's heat wave. I'm amazed that some courses are just starting to seed into thin and bare areas on greens and expect full recovery before winter arrives. After all, the weather has not cooperated all season, so why should it start now?

Granted, soil temperature are still pushing upper 60's during mid-day and you might see green bentgrass fuzz on a freshly-seeded site within 10 days or so, if (and a BIG if) the mild weather holds up and nights don't become too chilly. Small, isolated dime- to quarter-sized areas of thin turf can recover when bentgrass creeps in from the borders, but large bare areas need seed, heat and time. Why the pessimism? Do the math. Let's say you began the process the day after Labor Day.

Seeding bare area until you see green fuzz.	=10 days
Fuzz grows high enough to mow a few times.	+10 days
Several topdressings and mowing height adjustments to encourage turf to fill inbetween seed lines or aeration holes.	+ Weeks
	= November

This is assuming that you are taking the problem green out of play and raising the mowers to at least 0.180" and watering the seedlings several times a day and not getting the frost that is in the weather forecast for much of the upper Midwest. The bottom line is – don't count on a mid to late September seeding with bentgrass to do much good this season, especially when you continue to mow at or below 0.125" and keep the green in play. Think of that huge dead spot as a new green and you will realize that a green seeded during mid September will not be ready to play until June or July of next season. A winter cover might not be a bad idea, although the most benefit, with respect to increasing soil temperatures, will occur next spring.

No doubt, the outlook is pretty bleak for courses that lost grass on predominantly bentgrass greens. A better option may be to start patching the injured areas with sod from the nursery or the practice putting green right now if you don't want to be patching with sod next spring. Short days, long cool nights, low sun angles and plummeting soil temperatures are limiting your bentgrass options during a year when Mother Nature has a chip on her shoulder.

Some hope remains for thin, bare Poa annua greens that typically have plenty of live seed already in the soil. It's not unreasonable to expect a fair amount of recovery to occur on Poa greens during late September and October if we are lucky enough to experience a few weeks of Indian summer and some timely rainfall to compensate for the times we forget to irrigate weak greens during long periods of cool dry, weather.

In a nutshell, this has been a very difficult season that many superintendents want to forget... but one they will likely remember for a long time.



**Recovery from mid-summer losses of turf will be a challenge if you wait until Labor Day to start the process. Poa will have a better chance of establishment versus bentgrass now that days are shorter and nights are cooler..**