

# The 1991 Season

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## *At Least it Wasn't Boring*

By James M. Latham, Director  
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The 1991 season has been a good news/bad news affair so far, with weather conditions determining the difference much of the time. Good news came to the West in the spring, with timely rains which have brought precipitation records up to par for the first time in 5 or 6 years, but they were preceded by winter desiccation damage to greens, tees, and fairways on many courses. Desiccation? How about 80-mile-an-hour winds with still air temperatures at 20 degrees below zero!

Crown hydration/winterkill of **Poa annua**, which has plagued northern latitudes of Wisconsin to Montana the last two years, moved south to the Wisconsin-Illinois state line area and southward. Rather than general, across-the-board damage to all courses, it was a patchwork of turf loss. One course could be almost undamaged, while a neighbor was hurt severely. This provided an early season supply of grist for the mills of locker room agronomists. At the same time, though, it gave superintendents an opportunity to reintroduce bentgrass into weak spots and justify the formulation of pro-bent maintenance programs.

For other areas, the worst was yet to come. Southern Michigan and Chicagoland went through a most disquieting season. It was an accelerated growing season, according to one Michigan superintendent. July weather came in May, August in June, and a breath of September in late July. Not a very deep breath, though, because another spell of hot, humid weather finished off a lot of **Poa annua** already weakened by disease and the hot, humid, but rainless weather earlier in the summer. Any time winterkill or Summer Patch become destructive is the time to present a plan for regeneration of bentgrass to The Powers so that a means of funding can be found. In this way, adversity might become a positive beginning to more reliable playing surfaces.

**All of these woes were not shared democratically**, however. Many courses have come through the hard times in fine condition. Those with a predominance of bentgrass and Kentucky bluegrass fared well. Naturally, **Poa annua** seedlings came on strong after winterkill, but the high temperatures in late spring applied some degree of stress.

Hopefully, the new poa plants got a lot of competition by inter- or over-seeding with more dependable species. In hot weather, the percentage of bentgrass or bluegrass seedling survival is low, but poa competition will not be as great as it is in either fall or spring. And what is wrong with aeration, slit-seeding, etc., weak or dead areas during the prime playing season? At least, the golfers see something *positive* being done

to their course rather than our usual moaning about that blankety-blank P.a.

### **Golf Courses in the Midwest**

Have you noticed the number of golf championships being played in the Mid-Lands these days? Medinah, Hazeltine, Oakland Hills, Crooked Stick, Cog Hill, Edinburgh USA, SentryWorld, Crystal Downs, Kemper Lakes, Interlachen, Otter Creek, Golden Valley, Minikahda, Indianwood and others have become better known to competitive golfers of all ages in the last few years because of the USGA and PGA championships conducted in these environs in recent years. Architecture and style are, of course, the primary reasons for the associations to accept invitations to use these venues, but you can bet that course care comes next. The golf course superintendents at these courses, with backing by forward-looking Green Committees, have produced turf quality fit for champions as well as the non-handicapped.

The playing conditions at these courses did, at some time, favorably impress visiting golfers who communicate with The Powers who make decisions on competition sites. Potential hosts may not even be aware of this. That's why *playing quality* of the turf is usually as important as cosmetic greenness. Probably more. Thatchy, overwatered fairways are underwhelming, regardless of the shade of green. P. J. Boatright believed that play to firm, fast, fair greens demands firm, fast fairways.

### **The Courts**

Litigation or legislation? When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that committees could indeed promulgate rules exceeding those of USEPA, the door was opened for the political intimidation of governing bodies of all sizes. Timid politicians and highly vocal Anti groups can legislate away all pesticide use unless someone *locally* speaks up in their favor. This means that individual golf course superintendents, golfers, pros, club managers, as well as their organizations, will have to speak up.

We must talk to and inform our down-home folks in wards or precincts. Company lobbyists and pro-pesticide organizations cannot be of much help at community levels. If golf course managers *do* know more about pesticides than anyone in the neighborhood, they'd better begin speaking up. And *before* restrictions are proposed, not afterward, because the Anti's already have their ducks in a row. Remember that they know *how* to

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intimidate the pols, and scientific facts are of little concern. They deal in fear of the unknown and threaten law-givers with fear of being unseated. Golf courses of America are, *or should be*, prime examples of positive pesticide use, without distorting the population balance among 'harmless' bugs or beasts.

The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary program has attracted a great deal of positive comment from both public and private golf operations in this initial year of operation. It is a first step in removing some of the unintended secrecy about golf course operations. This program does require an accountable performance of some projects, but if it didn't, it would mean nothing to anyone. It provides *living* proof that good golf course operations do not interfere with the natural scheme of things. It also provides a means of communicating with golfers and neighbors and politicians that golf courses exert a positive effect in their environment.

It will also be to the advantage of golf course superintendents to tell anyone, whether they are deeply interested or not, about the special environmental research being funded by the USGA. It is a Straight-Arrow evaluation of what happens to fertilizer and pesticides after they are applied and have done what they were supposed to do. They don't just disappear, so what *does* happen to them? The nationwide study is being conducted by outstanding researchers at a number of cooperating universities. Talk it up to show people that golf is a responsible member of a community.

### Green Section Greens

An inordinate amount of ink has been sloshed around this year about some imagined or contrived controversy about well-established procedures which have proven to be successful for over 30 years. *CONTROVERSY!* is a media cliché used to grab attention by creating doubt or fear, not unlike the words used by Anti groups. The Green Section is making use of Dr. Norm Hummel's expertise in soil laboratory technique to ensure that the physical tests on putting green mixtures are consistent with the procedures established early on and that their results are reproducible.

Anytime a single green building procedure is adopted on a national basis, some local problems arise. That leads to a lot of nickel and dime nit-picking by people who ought to know better, thus confusing the issue and distorting the purpose of this construction technique. Personalities, prejudices and pettiness get in the

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way of performance. And who suffers? The golf course superintendent trying to do the best for his organization, who has learned that hip pocket soil mixes are hazardous to his employment longevity but is being misled by egotists or corner-cutters riding on short-term performance.

Green Section greens are real and they perform according to the construction procedures used. Maintenance is easy when one learns their characteristics. They are easily overwatered because they accept water easily. You might be surprised at the low water *requirement* when the perched water table is managed properly. And that, Virginia, is the reason we harp on having a sharp textural change just below the growing medium and feel that an intermediate sand layer is necessary between it and the gravel drainage bed below.

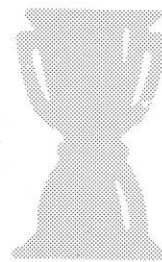
### Green Speed

When the putts don't fall and approach shots don't hold, what's the matter? According to some competitors in the Senior Open at Oakland Hills, the greens became "crispy and faster" during the gorgeous weather they enjoyed during the Thursday - Sunday rounds. To answer that complaint, we measured the greens in the afternoon as well as in the morning. At 6:30 a.m., Stimpmeter readings were 10.5 feet and at 5:30 (or so) in the afternoon they were 9.5 feet, except near the holes where the distance was 10.0 feet. So when your speed demons ask for more Stimp distance, ask them to play in mid-morning, not late afternoon.

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