

A Year to Remember

By BRETT HETLAND

Brooks Golf Club

Wow! That's all that comes to mind as I sit at my desk and ponder on all the vents that took place in my first year as a golf course superintendent at Brooks Golf Club in Okoboji, Iowa. First, I have to thank my instructors at North Dakota State University for the great education. Second, thanks goes to Craig Vigen of Fargo Country Club and Robert Schmidt of Bristol Ridge Golf Course for giving me hands on knowledge and preparing me to be a superintendent. Lastly, I would like to thank the ownership of Brooks Golf Club for believing in my abilities to take on the duties of superintendent as we expand to 27 holes in 2000.

I came to Brooks in January with great excitement and anticipation. I had finally been given the opportunity to be a Superintendent. The first two months were spent getting acquainted with my mechanic and assistant. I was very fortunate to have two very competent and hard working individuals. They serviced our fleet of 80 golf carts; ground over 100 reels; and performed winter maintenance on our equipment with little or no supervision. This allowed me to prepare my first budget; hire a seasonal staff; develop an employee manual; and learn the hole layout. March was spent creating a chemical and fertility plan, organizing files, creating an emergency plan, setting up mowing patterns and pin rotations, meeting the ownership and interviewing golf course contractors for our 10 hole addition.

Spring couldn't have come soon enough. I was bursting at the seams to get outside. Little did I know the mess that was to follow! We had just built a new clubhouse scheduled to open April 5 that didn't officially open until the end of May. The road leading to the new clubhouse was a rainwater collection site. There were times when four-wheel drive wasn't enough to get through the mud. To say the least, we had few golfers the first two months of the season. Fortunately, they built a beautiful clubhouse overlooking a spectacular set of four tees that are virtually completely surrounded with colorful annuals.

My first project of the year was to grow in a new hole (#2). The clubhouse was built on land that eliminated a hole. Unfortunately, planning wasn't the greatest and they put the cart before the horse. Our new #2 was built September of '98 and was not ready for play at the opening of the '99 season. There was extreme pressure from the clubhouse to get #2 open so we could be a full 18 holes. We finally opened the hole for play as a temporary on May 14 and the entire hole on Memorial weekend, although, it wasn't anywhere near what I would have liked it to be.

Project No. 2 was the complete renovation of our existing hydraulic irrigation system to electric. There were over 400 Toro 670 hydraulic heads replaced with Toro 750s and wire was pulled to new LTC plus satellites. The soil around 75% of the heads settled to appoint where they had to be re-level.

The biggest headache with this project was coordinating a hole to be closed so the irrigation contractor could work safely without dodging golf balls. This normally would not have been a problem but our new hole, #2, wasn't open for play yet thus leading to a 16 hole layout. This led to some dissatisfied golfers and added tension with the pro shop.

As if it wasn't enough, Project #3 started April 1st when Terry Johnson Construction broke ground on our 10 hole addition. I felt like I was running in circles. I tried to give the necessary time to the existing course as well as the new construction but it just wasn't possible. There were contractors pulling in all directions. If it weren't for a good crew and trusty Motorola radios I never would have been able to cope. Luckily, we hire out most of the work to be done. We had a landscape contractor for the clubhouse; three different cart path contractors; an engineering crew to stake the new course; a rural water representative that told us we were going to build our irrigation pond right over the top of an 8" rural water line; a county conservation representative wanting to know what steps were being taken to preserve the surrounding areas; an irrigation designer for the system and pump station; an irrigation contractor for installation; a golf course contractor with subcontractors; a golf course designer, and an excavator.

Project #4 was trying to provide PGA tournament like playing conditions on bent grass greens, tees and fairways on a moderate budget. The success of the golf course was directly related to projects 1-3 above and how synchronized our crews could be. Scouting would take up my mornings on the existing course as well as checking with the irrigation contractor and clubhouse discussing their progress and defining a plan. My assistant, Rod Johnson, was left with the task of getting hole #2 ready for play. He did a terrific job! My afternoons were spent making a loop through the new construction site and finished the day off with irrigation scheduling for the evenings run.

Many nights were spent checking the irrigation pumps to make sure they were running correctly. On the morning of May 28 the system had shut down. After further inspection, the intake screen on the check valve was completely clogged with bull heads. I have pictures for those of you who don't believe (YUK!) The water supply for that pond comes from East Lake Okoboji where the bull heads must have made the trip as eggs. As you all experienced, the summer heat took its toll on turf. We were no exception. A lot of the Poa checked out in the fairways. We began an aggressive overseeding program only to see the viable Poa seeds in the soil fight the new bent grass for dominance. September was very exciting as we seeded our new greens

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My First Year -

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on September 2 with *Poa annua* var. *reptans*; September 7 fairways and September 8 tees with L93 bent grass; September 9 roughs and native areas.

The first green mowed on the addition took place September 24 and the first fairway on October 8. Due to the lack of moisture this fall, very little of the rough has germinated. I hope to see a warm wet spring!! The irrigation system was blown out November 4. I am told this is the latest it has been but wish I would have left in on two more weeks. Mother Nature is tough to figure out. We put down our winter snow mold application on November 22 and the course was officially put to sleep for the year.

Without a doubt, this has been the busiest year in my life as well as the most gratifying. The thrill of my first year as a superintendent, the satisfaction of seeing the new course take shape, and the responsibility of making major decisions is very rewarding. I could not have done this without my education, the guidance from my old employers, and the help from all of you, my peers. There are few professions that are ready to help each other so willingly. There is a definite feeling of camaraderie among golf course superintendents. Thanks to all of you.

Western Minnesota Get-Together

Wed., March 15

10 a.m.-3 p.m.

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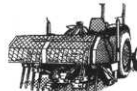
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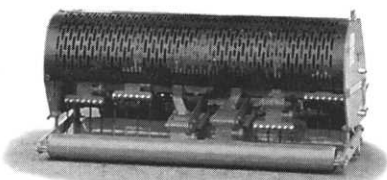


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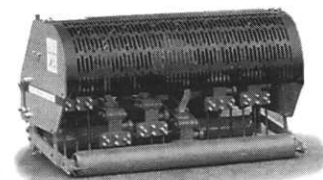


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