

NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL UPDATE

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North Central Region, USGA

The last week of August produced some of the hottest temperatures experienced this summer. Clearly, it has been a mild year, and as you would expect, there are no major agronomic issues. The single greatest concern and the most frequently discussed topic is labor. Following close behind under the agronomic topics is dollar spot disease.

Dollar Spot Disease: Leaf wetness is an issue that needs to be considered when battling dollar spot disease. On many visits it has become apparent that dollar spot disease activity is distinctly worse on those surfaces that are mowed last. Not surprising, leaf surfaces that stay wet longer does elevate disease activity. More and more golf courses are going back to dragging dew as an IPM strategy that does make a difference. As a side note, a 5/16-inch link chain tends to work better for dragging than rope, cable, or hose.

Labor Issues: There continues to be no easy answer for the labor crunch that most golf courses are experiencing. Even though we have entered late summer/early fall, the issue continues to compromise maintenance work as needs like aerification become a priority. A competitive starting wage, golf privileges, meals and even other benefits thrown in do not always draw dependable employees. Unfortunately, in many cases it seems to be a desire to avoid hard work. It does paint a scary picture for the future.

Roughs: A common topic this summer continues to be roughs. Most golf courses are maintaining a weekly cycle with rough mowing and very often a twice a week schedule is being pursued. Thicker, more aggressively growing rough does tend to bring out the whiners. Some have forgotten that rough means "not easy" and the purpose is to reward a ball hit on the fairway. If in fact complaints about the rough are the number one issue this season, then it has been a good season.

Hopefully, aerification work is on the calendar or already in the process of being completed. Next year may not be quite so gentle, and what is done over the upcoming fall season will have a big impact on the product presented next

summer. Thus, do not get bogged down with renovation projects at the expense of needed maintenance work like aerification. -- *Bob Brame*

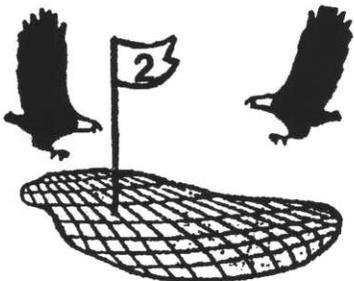
As I head back to the office following a week of visits, the weather forecast is calling for scattered frost in the morning. Clearly, the 2000 season is coming to an end. Generally speaking, it has not been a difficult year, but I'd stop short of saying it was an easy year. Although Mother Nature did not combine the wet weather with high temperatures, wet conditions alone have caused some compromise to turf quality and playability. Drainage issues have certainly been exposed and they should be placed high on the priority list. Drainage and efficient irrigation coverage are always investments worth making. Now is the time to make the investment if such needs exist.

Dollar spot disease intensity has subsided and gray leaf spot is at least on hold. There have been numerous sightings of grub damage both where insecticides have been applied and where none was used. The wet weather has caused more acreage to be vulnerable to grub damage. In most cases there would still be value in spot treating, as every grub killed now will be one less to deal with next year - but hurry, they will be going down soon.

Fall is a good time to identify trees for removal. Don't mark the trees; simply take notes of where tree removal needs to be pursued for better turf quality and playability next year. Actually, the earlier tree thinning/removal can be accomplished this fall the better. If now isn't possible then winter is certainly better than not doing it at all. Often the quiet of winter can help soften the emotions/politics.

A visit during the last week of September revealed the legitimate need for a golf course to utilize preferred lies. They had the worst earthworm infestation imaginable and the resulting smears of castings were yielding very poor turf quality and playability. We all know that there is no product labeled for earthworm control, as they offer many positive benefits. Yet, I had a hard time trying to convince the Committee that the smeared castings spread uniformly across every fairway on the course was in fact positive. Actually, I didn't try, and the final resolve was preferred lies. You see some strange things traveling for the USGA, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

It won't be long before the snow flies, so in the meantime build a solid foundation for next year's battle. As always, make sure your family is given the highest priority slot along the way. -- *Bob Vavrek*



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