

Take the Challenge

The Green Section's Turf Advisory Service helps pave the way to proper preparation and the ability to handle tough weather.

BY BOB BRAME

Most superintendents would agree that 2005 was a tough year to maintain quality golf turf. Dry, hot, then hot and wet, with hurricanes mixed in, all took a toll on golf course maintenance. However, some courses came through much better than others. Why do some courses handle tough conditions better than their counterparts down the road or even across the street?

The reasons for differences in course conditioning are many. One obvious factor is the natural random variations in the weather. In 2005 some courses experienced hot and wet for longer periods of time. Yet this is not the primary variance, as some who experienced the most extreme weather were still able to present unscathed courses.

Along with the harsh weather patterns in 2005, the economy has become a more pressing issue. Although proper funding has always been a factor with golf course maintenance, its impact has intensified over the last few years. Economic concerns have forced golf course maintenance operations across the country to reevaluate and redefine, which has resulted in budget cuts for some. Is this the primary difference for those that came through relatively unharmed — their budgets weren't reduced? No — courses both with and without imposed budget cuts came through the tough 2005 season in good condition.

Multiple other factors tie into the variations seen in course conditioning. For instance, the turf species being maintained made a difference in 2005,

with warm-season grasses coming through generally better than cool-season grasses. The physical attributes of the rootzone structure also play into the equation. Nonetheless, what rises to the top as the primary difference is proper preparation.

It's impossible to accurately predict the weather; therefore, doesn't that elevate the importance of being prepared for tough weather conditions with sound agronomics? Regardless of the budget level, which is ultimately fixed by course officials, isn't the objective to properly apply available funds and prepare for the worst-case scenario? From sound mowing practices and fertilization, to water management and providing the best possible grass-growing microenvironment, proper preparation aligns with preventative. Preventative measures are almost always less expensive and more effective than curative measures.

Regular review of the maintenance operation is very important to proper preparation. Just as a skilled author solicits experienced input to facilitate the rewriting process, a superintendent needs unbiased outside input to ensure proper preparation, as it's very easy to overlook something important. The Green Section's Turf Advisory Service (TAS) comprehensively addresses this need by offering professional, unbiased, and candid counsel.

Based on extended TAS experience as both a superintendent and staff agronomist, there is no question that those who subscribe every year gain the most. History — knowledge of the

maintenance operation over time and a relationship with the staff and course officials — will improve the value of recommendations offered. While we're available on any frequency a course desires, a minimum of one visit a year dramatically elevates our value to the maintenance operation and proper preparation. Will yearly TAS visits guarantee no problems? No, but they'll dramatically improve the odds.

A number of courses called with urgent needs in 2005, hoping that a visit could be scheduled the next day. While we're all about helping a course achieve its full potential and we'll juggle the calendar to get there as quickly as possible, it normally takes a few weeks to arrange a visit during peak season. Scheduling and travel logistics are a reality; thus, the importance of planning ahead ensures good continuity. Planning ahead also reduces the cost via our early-signup discount. Every effort continues to be made to hold down the cost of a TAS visit, with more than 60% of the actual expense being paid by the USGA.

If your course is a regular TAS subscriber, we look forward to an ongoing working relationship. If not, **take the challenge** — value satisfaction is guaranteed. Yearly TAS visits will improve your maintenance operation, and the difference will be most evident during tough years.

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