



RAIN

By Monroe S. Miller

It rained last night, and the relief it brought is buoying my spirits, nearly twenty-four hours later. And I'll still be feeling good about it three days from now.

I was out on the golf course before dawn this morning. It was a heavy rain and it felt as though the whole world was saturated. As it usually does during the summer months in Wisconsin, the wind was blowing from the southwest, warm as freshly buttered toast. The air was still heavy and smelled like rain does. Anyone who works out-of-doors and whose job is affected by the rain, or a lack of it, knows the smell. There were no stars. The thought that always comes to a Golf Course Superintendent's mind is, "Wish I knew if it was done raining — no sense in having the whole crew come to work if the course will be closed all day."

An event I recall with crystal clarity was my first awareness of how greatly rain influences our lives. It was sometime in the late fifties when I was just a grade school kid going to our neighborhood one room school. We were in the throws of a terrible drought. My grandfather and I were riding together in from the fields on a load of hay. Dad was on the tractor.

The steep slopes of Grant County farms required careful and slow navigation, and that gave the two of us a great chance to visit as well as catch our breath and rest. It was the time of the second cutting of hay and it was a very light harvest. The grown-ups were worried about the crops. As we rode past rows and rows of thirsty corn with their leaves all curled inward, the air was filled with dust. The wagon tires were running in six inches of powder.

The worry was of enough feed for livestock through the long Wisconsin winter months, of adequate well water and dry stream beds. Those all related to survival, and I knew it. I asked him if he had ever seen it this dry before. Immediately and without hesitation he brought up the disastrous drought of 1936. He was worried we were headed for another one of those years. But the rains finally did come, in time to

salvage a corn crop and survive another year.

As I headed back to the shop, a bolt of lightning flashed across the sky and the thunder crashed, scaring the living bedickens out of me — too much day-dreaming. I hustled up the hill to the shop, looking forward to a rainy day inside. There are always a hundred productive things to do in the shop on these days. And I think our crew, those who come in, enjoy the lighthearted atmosphere a spell of rain can bring to a golf course.

There is something very cozy and very comforting about the sound of the rain on the metal roof of our building. Even though my office is insulated, I can hear it there and enjoy it. You can almost go into a trance, standing in the doorway looking out over the golf course. I love it.

And I love the way the shop smells during and right after a rain, sort of a combination of gasoline and diesel fuel and wet grass and cigarette smoke. To many, the thought of that combination of aromas wouldn't be very inviting. But those who've worked in a golf course shop, even for only a summer season, know what I speak of. Frankly, after a prolonged dry spell, the smell of moisture on the dry soil and sand is a tonic to breathe. The rain seems to bring out the perfumes of pine needles and old, dry leaves and wood, too. The scent of rain, for a moment, can be the most glorious aroma in the world.

The song says, "Rainy days make me blue." Ask most people what color a rain day is, and what do they say? Gray. But not a Golf Course Superintendent. Not on a golf course. What I see on rainy days is green. Everything is green, many different greens. Bright green. Blue green. Yellow green. Gray green. The contrasts are fantastic, all of the dozens of them. The pale of dormant roughs and the thinned areas on greens and tees and fairways are almost miraculously back to their proper and rightful shade of green.

A beautiful soaking rain like this one we had last night makes it pretty obvious that even a quality irrigation sys-

tem like one of those available these days really is only a stop gap measure between rainfalls. Regardless of the effort put forth to handwater the last and final square foot of turf, a hot and dry summer without adequate and timely rainfall is the "great equalizer" in golf course management, making us all a little more humble.

Most of the time, during the summer, I rank weathermen and plant pathologists under the "perverted" category. Call Dr. Worf about some new, strange, exotic and fast spreading disease on your golf course and he is genuinely excited! Listen closely to your local meteorologist and his forecast — "Glorious all weekend — sunny and hot and no rain!" It is a bit tiring reading the same forecasts in the paper, morning after morning. Not so bad, maybe, if you're planning a picnic or a wedding or a parade. But it's damned depressing to hear all of these "happy" forecasts if you are trying to run a golf course. What I want to hear is "rain tomorrow."

I always hope that when the rain ends, the sky will remain beautifully gray and overcast. The best day has a cool breeze coming from the north off Lake Mendota, offering up a final cleansing of the air. Unfortunately, during those one hundred days of summer, we all know that isn't going to happen.

Most often, following a rain like this which holds mowing back for one or two days, the rain stops at noon. Then the sun comes out, bright, and all of a sudden it gets real hot. The crew has to go out and get the golf course mowed for play and they aren't real happy about it — they know they'll be here late. The golf players are even less happy because they can't use golf cars and will have to walk in the heat and humidity. I'm worried about pythium. Clouds of gnats and mosquitoes are everywhere. The grass clumps up wherever you mow, and these aren't the best conditions to collect clippings on fairways — "six feet and dump" will require days to finish and we don't have that kind of time. Leave the

baskets off. Still, all in all, I wouldn't trade those showers for anything, despite this subsequent attending and inevitable misery.

The bicentennial year of 1976 was the driest in my sixteen years at Blackhawk Country Club; ask Bob Erdahl about that summer. He was my assistant. During the summer of 1976 I asked Vincent the same question I'd asked my grandfather twenty years previous. Same answer — 1936.

And in that summer, in my childhood, in the 1950s, when we needed that rain so badly, I remember praying for rain for the first time in my life. In July of 1901, seven Boston clergymen preached on the topic, "Can Prayer Bring Rain?" Four of them concluded that it could and three of them had reservations. It is not recorded whether or not they made a field test.

But I did this time. And this time, my prayers for rain were answered.

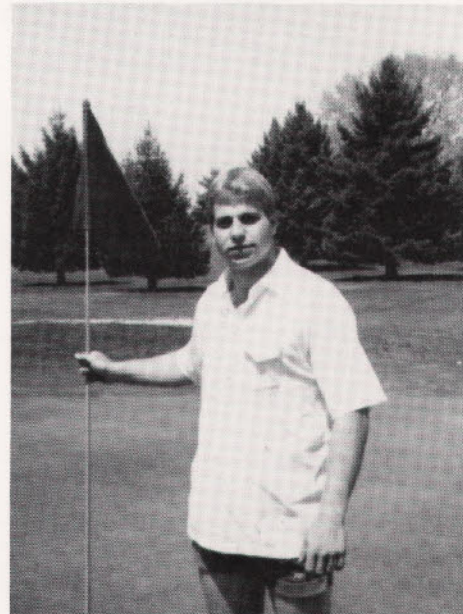
Thank you, Lord, for this beautiful rain.

MONGE WINS "JAMES R. LOVE" SCHOLARSHIP

Todd Monge has been chosen to receive this year's Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association "James R. Love" Turfgrass Scholarship. Monge is a junior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where he is majoring in Soil Science with the Turfgrass Management specialty.

Todd has been employed at the Nakoma Golf Club and worked under WGCSA member Randy Smith since May of 1985. In addition to learning the practical aspects of golf turf management at Nakoma, he has participated in the CALS Internship Program. His studies in this area included *Poa annua* invasion of golf green approaches and a golf course construction project.

Our congratulations to Todd along with the best of luck in his turfgrass management career.



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