



# Reminiscing 1988

By Monroe S. Miller

If ever there was a year worthy of recollection, surely it was 1988. The good news, the bad news and the extremes of such a year need recording. Putting memorable events on paper tends to give them credibility, something our successors may want to see. They probably won't believe what we'll tell them.

And reminisce is what I mean — I promise no 1988 mea culpas and no 1989 forecasts or resolutions. All of those are boring.

But the year past was anything but boring for golf course superintendents. In fact, the way it started out gave some hope to us that it could be a great year. What I'm talking about was the biggest news at last year's Masters. After years of "closet" complaining, some golf professionals went public with their anger, frustration and disgust with fast greens.

Sports page headlines read, *Zoeller Sees Red On Fast Greens*, and *Lyle Leads; Fuzzy Fumes*, and *Crenshaw Criticizes Greens*. Fuzzy Zoeller led the charge. On the second day of the Masters, Zoeller was in third place. Was America's most cheerful golfer happy? "I'm not mad. I'm (bleeped)," said the 1979 Masters champ. "It's a joke out there," he said of the super fast and extra hard greens. "You're just tapping it. You're praying to God to stop the ball within eight or nine feet of the hole and make the next one coming back. Now if that's golf, I'm in the wrong damn league."

Zoeller's anger included a total denunciation of the direction of major tournament golf in America since 1973. Most of my friends in the golf course management business didn't comment on that, but were really cheering him for speaking out on ridiculously fast greens. It was a long time coming, but it arrived with a bang!

"Nobody's having any fun," Fuzzy elaborated. "I hate it when they do like they have done to these greens. Golf is supposed to be fun, and it's no fun as hard and as fast as these greens are."

"A large number of the players feel like I do, but they're afraid to speak out." Without naming names, but in an obvious reference to tournament officials, Zoeller said the problem was that "egos are getting in the way." That's similar to something I wrote three or four years ago in the *GRASS ROOTS*. And I still believe it.

After the third round, the low scorer for the day had more harsh criticism for the fast greens. Said Ben Crenshaw: "I can't say that it was fun. On downhill putts you've just got to breathe on the ball and hope it stops somewhere near the hole."

"That green (the 11th) is dead," Crenshaw said. "There is nothing to hold the ball at all. They're going to have to call in the fire department on that one." Added Zoeller, "I think they should take a picture of the 11th green and have it framed. It's as hard as that — — — wall over there"

Zoeller also said that his hot words were warmly received by the players. Bernard Langer added emphasis to Zoeller's observations about the greens.

If golf players listen to agronomic reasons from the golf course manager and game reasons from the touring golf pros, maybe this ridiculous situation will improve in 1989. That remains to be seen. But the courage of Zoeller, Crenshaw, et. al. to finally speak up will make 1988 memorable for that alone. It was good news.

Around Father's Day of last year, one of my most cherished beliefs was challenged; the assumption that I have lived with my whole life, that no two snowflakes are alike, was disputed by a researcher. Bitter disappointment. An obvious error. Surely an unfounded claim. An insult to the late W. A. Bentley of Jericho, Vermont.

A researcher at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado made the discovery of what may be the first matching set of snow

crystals (Meteorologists like the term "snow crystal" more than "snowflake" because it reflects the fact that they take many forms other than the popular six-pointed image. Snow crystals can be shaped like stars, needles, columns, plates and even plain of lumps.).

Disappointing as this researcher's letter in the May issue of the *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* was, it did have a Wisconsin connection. The crystals were captured on a glass slide exposed in a cloud on a research flight over Wausau! The capture was made on November 1, 1986. The glass plate was coated with oil and exposed to the Wausau cloud for 11 seconds at 20,000 feet. The plate was kept cold until the plane returned to the ground and the snow crystals were photographed.

To preserve the theory that no two snowflakes are alike, we should ask researchers to produce evidence to the contrary. They couldn't do it — the snow crystals were not saved. Who could let a picture ruin such a long held belief?

Speaking of old beliefs falling by the wayside, another one took a long tumble when Dr. Joe Vargas, our friend from Michigan State University, had a MSU report quoted in *Midwest Living* magazine.

Dr. Vargas told everyone to forget what we learned over the years about growing healthy bluegrass. He says frequent light watering — 1/10th of an inch every day — produces a better looking and healthier lawn than a deep and thorough watering once or twice a week. He claims his recommendation does not encourage shallow roots.

This same report recommends what our own Dr. Kussow does concerning another matter — late fall N fertilization. At least there is some agreement in this quarter.

Dr. Vargas said he took a beating after his MSU report came out, but he is standing firm.

A tenth of an inch a day?

A Wisconsin connection cropped up in a news release from the National Golf Foundation. It carried some surprising stats — surprising to out-of-staters, anyway.

Golf is in a "boom" time all across the country, but is really enjoying a lot of interest here at home. For instance, Wisconsin **leads the nation** in golf participation, with 15.9 percent of our citizens being golfers. As a reference, Mississippi (a warm weather southern state with a 12-month season) has a participation rate of 3.6 percent of its population playing golf.

Despite being well down the population list, we rank ninth in the total number of golfers with 731,613 players. And we're tied for third in the percentage of females (28%) playing golf.

It's all good news for those of us who manage golf courses here in the Badger State.

There's a new (to me, at least) publication coming across my desk these days. It's called *GOLF WEEK*, and the November 19, 1988 issue had an article on the "Making of a Superintendent." The paper has a section called "Course Management and Golf Business", and the story I'm referring to is the first in a series. This one dealt with what golf course owners expect from a golf course superintendent.

Most of the story was trite, until the author started quoting Peter Trenchard. Some WGCSA members got a chance to meet Peter in Houston at the GCSAA Conference. Others may have gotten to know him in Sturgeon Bay where our November meeting was held. Peter happens to own Cherry Hills of Door County.

Most course owners quoted in the story placed emphasis on a technical education. Trenchard didn't disagree, but he stated that he wants a well-rounded, liberally educated superintendent. He said that good technical knowledge was a must — plant pathology to hydraulics. But then he added: "I want somebody who knows as much about Mozart and Picasso as he does

about cutworms. I like to have dinner with my superintendent and there isn't much you can say about cutworms after the first drink."

Perceptive guy, that Peter Trenchard. I happen to agree with his philosophy.

Rod Johnson helped make 1988 a good year for his own golf course as well as for golf in Wisconsin. Gathering all of his persuasive power, he was able to convince Geoffrey Cornish to travel to Pine Hills a few times and design a master redevelopment plan for the golf course.

I was elated when Rod called with the news that Geoff had agreed. The Wisconsin golf course scene was incomplete, in my view, until then. Many renown golf course architects have left their design mark here — Robert Trent Jones, A. W. Tillinghast, Bobby Jones, Roger Packard, Dick Nugent, Ken Killian, et. al. But until his work at Pine Hills, Dr. Cornish had not done any course design work in our state. We will be richer for it.

I thought of Geoff often during the 1988 presidential campaign — he received a Ph.D. at the same time as did Michael Dukakis, both from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

In terms of weather, 1988 was not a good year for golf courses. It wasn't a very good year for our state university in Madison in a lot of ways, either. The athletic department is awash in red ink, the football team was worse than lousy, the CALS took a lot of unfair and unjustified criticisms over the sustainable agriculture issue, and some idiot(s) designed a Memorial Library addition that would block the view of the capitol from Bascom Hill. Added to all of that were shrill and overblown cries about racism that were captured on the night-

ly news, almost every night for a while.

What tends to happen in a rash of bad publicity — some true and some not — is good news about this institution is either lost or overlooked. A loyal alumnus and a state citizen like me has to point out that the UW-Madison is **again** the nation's leading public research university. Figures released by the prestigious National Science Foundation showed that for the fifth consecutive year, the UW ranked third overall among U.S. universities and first among the public universities in money spent for research and development. For fiscal 1987, which ended on September 30, 1987, those research expenditures totaled more than \$254 million, an increase of more than \$23 million from the previous year. The money came from the federal government, the state, private foundations and industry. The sum obviously included those funds donated by the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association.

These monies didn't just happen to fall into the hands of university staff. Most of it is won competitively by the faculty from those sources other than the state of Wisconsin. That whole process reflects on the quality and the hard work of the faculty and represents an important economic enterprise for Wisconsin.

Johns Hopkins University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, both private institutions which receive big time money from the U.S. Defense Department, finished ahead of Madison. The UW was followed by Cornell, Stanford, the University of Michigan, the University of Minnesota, Texas A & M, UCLA and the University of Illinois. One cannot help but notice that four of the top ten are Big Ten schools here in the midwest.

This good news came at a good time. It gives some powerful bragging rights.

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