

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

(And A Report Card)

By Monroe S. Miller

Another GCSAA International Conference and Show is in the history books. This one, as were the twenty previous conferences I have attended, will be a highlight of my professional year.

Frankly, by the time late fall comes around, I am already anticipating the National. Sometimes it is justified; sometimes it is not. But as with many other things in life, there isn't such a thing as a "poor" one. It is, rather, a situation where some Nationals are merely better than others.

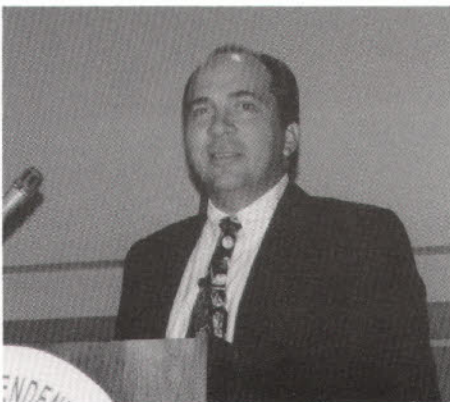
With that in mind, here are a few thoughts about the week in Anaheim, California.

Anaheim Facilities

I have been in Anaheim for this meeting four times now. I have always enjoyed the convenience of the convention center to the hotels. Over the years, as Carl Grassl noted, there have been a lot of changes in the immediate area around the convention center. Places that had strawberry or vegetable fields or fruit orchards in 1974 now host hotels and parking lots.

We were warned NOT to walk around outside after dark. No surprise—evidence of gang activity was everywhere. You have to wonder where we are headed when you are not safe right next to Disneyland.

Although it didn't affect me, I heard a lot of grouching from spouses who made the trip, too. There simply isn't anything at the convention facilities and surrounding areas but convention facilities. There is nowhere to walk. It is far



Guest speakers included Johnny Bench and...



Welcome to the 64th GCSAA conference.

different from downtown sites. And the unbearable traffic makes a car rental somewhat of a marginal proposition.

That notwithstanding, audio/visual equipment, meeting rooms and other amenities important for success were very good. Hotels were clean and their service was good. But there was a cost involved; this is an expensive place to hold a meeting. Parking—free a short four years ago—now is offered at a considerable cost.

All those things considered, the Anaheim facilities earn a respectable grade of B-.

Opening Session

This event, which I have never missed in twenty-one conferences, had Bill Roberts' signature all over it. He eliminated a lot of the excess that normally almost ruins this session. Lots of people don't come to this session because it has been too long and too



Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, shown here with Bill Roberts.

boring for too many years. Good for Bill for recognizing this and doing something about it.

I thought the Distinguished Service Award winners were well chosen. Everyone knows of Dr. Beard's contributions and Dr. Gibeault's long history of contribution to the turfgrass industry.

But Willie gets knocked down a grade for showing that incredibly boring slide show. I realize that if there is a place for GCSAA to be self-serving, it is at the annual conference.

But all who have been at least partly attentive to GCSAA knows of its accomplishments; a presentation that long ought to be offered as an option rather than foisted upon an unsuspecting, innocent, supportive and good natured crowd.

So long was it that a well known person in attendance literally fell asleep! The piece was well done—no argument. It was simply shown to the wrong crowd.

Johnny Bench was a fine keynoter—I am a rubber neck from way back and was delighted to see and hear him. See elsewhere for a keynote grade.

The opening session was made better for me because I got to sit right next to Tuck and Becky Tate. They added to the event.

For all these reasons, the opening session gets a solid grade of B.

Keynote Speaker

I sort of assumed Johnny Bench would be from the same mold as Terry Bradshaw—you know, an All-Star 14

times, 1968 Rookie-Of-The-Year, 1972 baseball MVP, World Series MVP and a Hall of Famer. His name is synonymous with baseball, like Ted Williams, Robin Yount and Henry Aaron.

He was a great athlete and a good citizen. You never heard about Bench in the same breath with drugs and womanizing and greed, unlike most baseball players today.

Bench was a pretty good speaker, too. His message, built around the vowels A, E, I, O and U, a few jokes and memories of his illustrious career, did not compare to Terry Bradshaw's. Bradshaw, for me, has become the benchmark for keynote speakers.

John's talk didn't hang together particularly well, and his attempts at extemporaneous speaking were not good.

Bradshaw hung around for an hour after his talk, to sign autographs, pose for photos and visit with fans.

Bench was gone before the applause ended, escaping without a single autograph.

Although I was glad for the chance to see John up close and to hear him, I have to give him a B-.

Formal Educational Program

When I first saw the formal educational program, I was very heartened. Planners decided to give presenters 30 minutes to spend with the audience. I have contended for years that very little gets said in twenty minutes. I also very much liked splitting academic presentations completely away from lectures given by colleagues.

Chad and I had most of the concurrent sessions covered very well. Left out were those with no application—southern turfgrass management, for example. Even for them we tried to



Love that fresh Anaheim air. There are mountains somewhere in that mess. Looking east toward Anaheim Stadium, barely visible.

visit with people who did attend to get an evaluation.

There were some great lectures. Dr. Wilkinson's information on patch diseases, which included a lot of theory, was excellent.

Dr. Jim Beard gave both a history and the latest research on a subject getting a lot of attention today—putting green rolling. He shared data from last season, offered some interpretation and talked about next season. It was worth the price of admission.

I wasn't the only one interested in his material—the lecture hall was jammed, wall to wall. Professors Gaussoin, Kopec, Rieke and Niemczyk all did good work, speaking on subjects both interesting and important and informative.

But after that, I thought the dropoff was steep. The material often was redundant or boring or poorly presented or just not very applicable.

Sorry. I was disappointed. Frankly, I think last October's Symposium had

more of this kind of information than the National.

Sadly, the Wednesday concurrent sessions get a dreary C-.

Innovative Superintendent I and II

Generally, pretty good. I cannot figure out, for the life of me, why a room is selected that doesn't provide a seat for everyone who wants to attend. I mean, this convention center covers acres and acres. Is this poor planning or what?

The 6:30 a.m. session was packed all to wall. One literally could not get into the door by 7:30. No excuse accepted.

The subjects offered up at these sessions reflect the practical side of golf course management and have great appeal to people like me. The idea of starting at 6:30 a.m. makes a lot of sense for an audience that is usually "up and at 'em" by that time or earlier.

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A couple of old WGCSA warhorses, Jeff Bottensek and Rod Johnson.



Old friends were there too. Like Florida's Joel Jackson, guest at our 1990 Symposium. He's also editor of *THE FLORIDA GREEN*.

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The morning session also had the advantage of not competing with the equipment show, and is almost automatically guaranteed a bigger audience than the one convened after lunch.

Given the choice, I might try to give heightened visibility to these educational offerings in the program and the conference propaganda. Too many people were unaware of them—remember, the overflowing crowd was due to a small room. And in the afternoon, the show competition is fierce.

This is a tough issue. And I give the GCSAA credit—they have, over the years, arranged the educational sessions every which way.

But there is a lot to be said about talks, good talks, given by golf course superintendents about issues and problems we face up close and personally everyday.

For now, I give the IS I & IS II a good grade of B+.

Employee Issues Forum

I was embarrassed when I went into the hall where this half day meeting was held. I made it there in time to listen to half the lectures.

They were long—an hour apiece—but contained a lot of information. Granted, this program might well suit a lawyer better than a golf course superintendent. There wasn't a word about machinery or grass or golf itself. But in the world we now work in, these subjects are important (albeit boring).

I especially liked the lecture given by Mr. Jones, a handicapped person who also loves golf, about the Americans with Disabilities Act and how it relates to golf course superintendents.

The embarrassment came because out of the 15,000 in attendance about 30 managed to attend this afternoon session. Seriously. I couldn't make that up.

Oh, well. It was my gain and everyone who wasn't there was the loser.

I give this session a good solid grade of A-.

Environmental General Session

Expectations for this session, for me at least, were very high after last year's similar session. John Stossel had Jay Feldman's (NCAMP) butt for breakfast that morning. It was a beautiful thing to behold.

Everyone has heard of Senator Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio. Few knew of Representative Jimmy Hayes of Louisiana.

That has changed. Hayes was articulate, persuasive and reasonable. Metzenbaum was, well, Metzenbaum. Just what I expected. Only older.

Frankly, I would like to ring the neck of every dimwit who WASN'T there. Two major decision makers travelled clear across the country to discuss important issues that affect us deeply. And the hall was, for all practical purposes, empty.

The lack of interest on the part of golf course superintendents spoke volumes. The vast majority were on the show floor, kicking tires and talking shop. That is necessary work, but there are times when equipment takes a back seat to environmental issues.

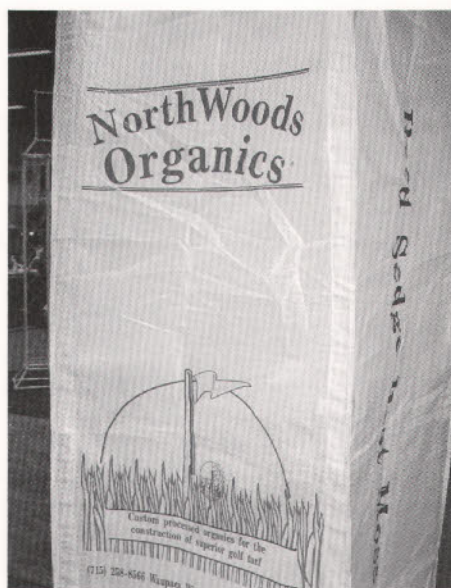
And those NOT there will be the ones screaming the loudest when legislation they do not like passes Congress.

Metzenbaum is hardly an ally. I watched him shade his eyes, cast a look across the empty hall—it was cavernous—and shake his head. It was obvious that he was disgusted. I can only guess what he thinks about our profession.

In his lecture, he quoted from NCAMP. We had a chance to win him over, or at least create a favorable impression. But instead, we blew it. All those not there should be ashamed.

The difference between the two men was this: Hayes is very concerned about the environment AND people, and he uses his constituents lives as a factor in his decision making process; Metzenbaum never mentioned people or jobs as a source of concern. He merely quoted NCAMP.

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Waupaca Sand has a new product—peat for topdressing amendment.



Greens rollers were everywhere!



John Deere has a good looking five-plex nearly ready for the turf marketplace.



Jacobsen has a new utility truckster which drew a lot of interest.



The best entertainment we've ever had—The Beach Boys!

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But I strongly feel we have to listen to people like Metzenbaum. We have to establish a dialogue with them and clearly express our position and the science behind it.

You don't do that very well with an empty room. I give the program a strong A and golf course superintendents an F.

Equipment Show

Is "awesome" an overworked adjective? Probably. But it fits the description of the equipment show.

This year's GCSAA equipment and supply show was the biggest ever. Cavernous. Exciting. Colorful. Fun. Exceptional. I'd argue that seeing the show alone is worth the registration price. If a product has an application to golf turf management, it is at the show.

The enormous Anaheim convention center had its four bays full. Plus, we took over the Arena, too.

Buying decisions are wiser and easier after two and a half days on the floor.

A green committee chairman from one of our state's finest golf clubs was in town for a different convention and decided to stop over for a while for a "look see". Well, he stayed all day and was overwhelmed by it all. He is, I understand, making plans for going to Dallas next year.

There are many who say the show is the best part of conference week. They won't get much argument from me.

But I heard this question several times during the week: "Is the show actually getting TOO big?"

Food for thought. Regardless of the answer, the 1993 GCSAA Equipment Show earns the grade of A+.

Annual Banquet

Another event with Bill's signature all over it. I like to flatter myself and think he read last year's report card for the Conference and agreed that the falderal at the head table had to be shortened, out of simple courtesy.

The business started at 8:14 p.m. Introductions went smoothly and quickly. No silliness; all businesslike.

Next year the GCSAA has to limit any speaker to 10 minutes. I was watching carefully—after 10 minutes people in the audience start getting antsy. After 15 minutes they are actually restless. After 20 minutes people are actually talking out loud. If no one is listening, why let someone drone on, regardless of who it is?

I want to renew my call for a trap door behind the podium. Anyone who exceeds the allotted time will disappear. NEXT!

Just about when I feared riots and open revolt, the great woman golfer

Patty Berg stepped to the podium. She was the best! Despite her 75 years, her voice is strong and her wit is sharp. We were, literally, saved by Patty Berg.

It was a nice touch to have a former OLD TOM MORRIS award winner present to this year's recipient. And no argument—Dinah Shore has done a lot for golf and deserves the recognition. And she still has a great voice.

The meal was excellent, and so was the service. That is not always the case. Who likes cold food, small portions and mean waiters? Not I. The desert was a little tough—Rod Johnson had more chocolate on his shirt and beard than in his stomach—but it was tasty nevertheless.

Banquet earns a grade of B+. A little less wind and the score would have been an A.

Entertainment

Then came the Beach Boys. WOW! I checked out the stage before the banquet began and expected quite a show. There were all kinds of instruments ready to go to work—5 (count 'em—five!) keyboards, drums and bongos, 4 guitars, alto and tenor and base saxophones, a flute, and more. The control center along the north wall looked like something NASA might use to launch the space shuttle. And some of the speakers were individually as big as one wall in my shop. I was drooling.

And rockin'! All the over 40 rockers were rockin'. Dr. Randy Kane was at our table and had quite a workout during the entertainment.

The under 40 rockers were rockin', too. In fact, the under 10 rockers were movin' and groovin' to the music I grew up with 25 to 30 years ago.

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As near as I could tell, only Mike Love and Al Jardine of the original Beach Boys are still at it. And can those old fellas sing! *A cappella* never sounded better, especially since today's Beach Boys has ten members. All of them except Love play instruments.

And they played all the great hits—all of them, from *Be True To Your School* to *Kokomo*, from *Barbara Ann* to *Help Me Rhonda*, from *California Girls* to *The Sloop John B*.

Great! A perfect entertainment choice for a California meeting. Could, in fact, the Beach Boys be the best entertainment ever heard at a GCSAA banquet?

YES! YES! Absolutely YES!

I hope the pattern is broken for Dallas, though. It is tough to compare this year's *I Get Around* with the Haystacks' version of *Achy Breaky Heart*. The only GCSAA entertainment I ever walked out of was some chick named Tanya Tucker who appeared at our banquet in Washington, D.C. That was hill billy music and it was bad.

The entertainment gets its own grade of A++++++.

USGA Green Section Annual Educational Program

One of the things I am most proud of in my professional life is membership on the USGA Green Section Committee. I take the responsibility seriously because I know, first hand, what a help the Green Section can be for a golf course superintendent. I have never missed this meeting for as long as it has been part of the GCSAA conference. One year, I was even included as a speaker on their program.

There have been many years when the Green Section program all by itself was worth what it cost to get to the conference. The GCSAA presentations, in a sense, were extras. But I cannot lie, despite long and sincere loyalties. This year's program was a disappointment.

The subjects selected were certainly relevant; too many of the talks were not. The information given by Dr. Beard was needed and is a valued addition to our resources. Honestly, I cannot recall what Mr. Jones' message was. The same goes for Jerry Pate. It is nice to have "names" on the program, but they should have a message for us to take home.

Anyone who attended the opening session heard Bill Roberts' talk, only with a different narrator.

The turf tips were, as always, very good, very practical and useful.

But the tip about modifying a broken golf club shaft for use as a soil sampling tube was not original. Dr. Jim Love was showing students how to do that 25 years ago!

Confidence reigns, however, and next year's program will be back to the level we have come to expect. Bet on it.

USGA conference is awarded a grade of C.

SIDELIGHTS AND AWARDS

What's Hot? Equipment for rolling greens. Last year there were two separate pieces. This year someone counted 15! They ranged from the Australian machine I recognized from last year (more or less introduced to the entire country by *BULL SHEET* editor Fred Opperman) to attachments (very expensive) for your triplex greensmowers.

What's New? My vote goes to utility vehicles. Jacobsen and Toro are industry leaders, and this year's show saw each display their own engineered truckster. They are multi-purpose vehicles and will dent the Cushman market.

Confusion. Speaking of Cushman, is Cushman now Ransomes? Or is Ransomes really Cushman? Is Steiger red or green? Or does Steiger even exist anymore? Is your new Cushman going to be bright green or forest green? Where will you buy your new Cushman? Will it be complemented with red paint or pea green paint? Who's who? Who cares? We do.

These wonderful veteran companies seem to have an identity crisis, at least in the eyes of many golf course superintendents. Do us and yourselves a favor—get this straightened out and then let us know what is going on.

P.S. Can I still buy a Ryan sodcutter to replace an old one?

Touch Of Class I. Dr. J.B. Beard showed a lot of class when accepting his Distinguished Serviced Award when he gave a great deal of the credit for his successful life to his wife Harriett.


Touch Of Class II. Bill Roberts, with his usual humility, expressed sadness and pride on leaving the GCSAA presidency. He remembered to thank all his friends from Wisconsin, some named personally, who helped him achieve the ultimate in the GCSAA.

Best Lecture. This varies all over golf's horizon, based on your course, location, problems, budget, etc. But for my money, Dr. Hank Wilkinson's lec-

ture on the patch diseases was superb. Strong voice, excellent slides and visuals, brevity in his remarks, super blend of the science and the practical, intimate familiarity with the supporting research. Obviously, a hands-on researcher like Wilkinson who has a clear vision of how his work can help golf turf is appealing to golf course superintendents. He gave us a good understanding of the fungi at work which will help greatly in designing a control program. Dr. Wilkinson is doing just what I think a professor at a land grant college can do best—help citizens solve very real problems.

This was a great lecture.


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Best Freebie. Jacobsen hat wins by a mile-wide margin. Great color, great fabric, beautiful stitching and show design. It is a pleasure to make this the 21st in my string of Jake show hats. Thanks to them for their generosity.

Turnaround Award. Given to John Deere. Don Henderson and his engineering staff at Horicon have really turned around the JD line of grass machinery. Five years ago their booth displayed equipment made by others and painted JD green and yellow. They must have figured out it takes more than a coat of paint with the right colors to get people to buy from them. Most of us were not fooled!

I really spent a lot of time there this year. John Deere tractors have always been excellent. Now, the rest of their turf line is really shaping up. I was impressed by the look of their lightweight fiveplex, designed to compete with the LF-100 and the 5100D. It will be for sale in a year—they also have learned the value of field testing. With a couple of small changes, it should be a big winner.

When they solve their distribution confusion, they will be set for success.

Best Night Spot. Cowboy Boogie Co., located a few blocks from the convention center. I wasn't there, but lots of guys were. When I hear an Easterner say, "I could get used to boots and a cowboy hat," I have to believe it's a pretty good place to relax.

It Was Good To See: Stan Zontek, Ralph Nictora, Randy Kane, Jeff Nus, Don Hearn, Charlie Cross, Ron Milenski, Jim Moore, Clay Loyd, Jack Sullivan, Peter Salinetti, the Bell Boys, Peter Cookingham, Tony Grosso, Paul Sabino, Tuck and Becky Tate, Jim Gilligan, all of my chapter editor friends (some of whom I'd never met despite phone calls and letters, especially Pat Finlan and Dave Finney). Plus, I was glad to get to meet Dean Knuth.

For The Rubber Necks: Ben Crenshaw, Patty Berg, Dinah Shore, Beach Boys, Garth Brooks (seen by some at the Cowboy Boogie Co.), Robert Trent Jones, Jerry Pate, Howard Metzbaum, Spanky (for the second year).

Quotable Quotes:

"Golf course superintendents are the catchers of golf."

—Johnny Bench

"Golf is no environmental problem; it is an environmental answer."

—Robert Trent Jones II

"Do I want what I can see or do I want what I can afford?"

—Jerry Pate

"I feel like I'm following Billy Graham on his best day!" Dinah Shore, referring to her introduction by Patty Berg. "I've never heard anyone say, 'There's this tennis court in Scotland that you've got to see.'"

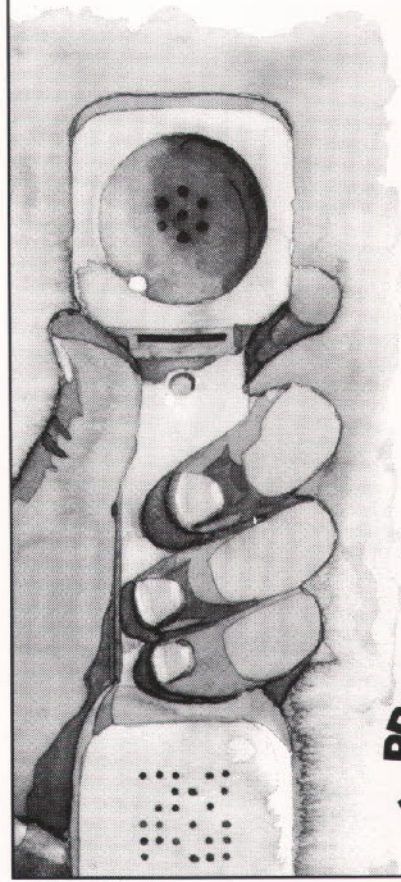
—Dinah Shore

TALK TO TERRA

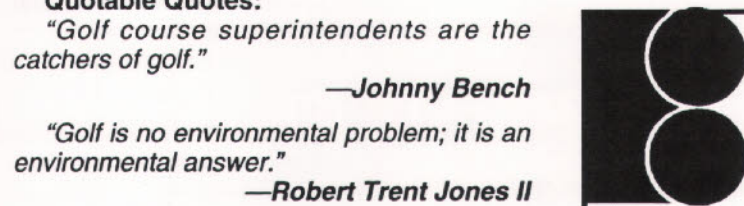
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