

CONFERENCE '96 - A TRIP TO FLORIDA

By Monroe S. Miller

It seemed perfect—killer cold headed into Wisconsin two days before we were to leave for the 1996 GCSAA conference in Orlando. The thoughts of the warm Florida sunshine in Orlando were especially sweet in the midst of the -30 degrees F the morning we left Madison.

Although it was cold in Madison, it was colder still in Minnesota. Schools were closed and entire towns shut down in the face of -40 degrees F to -60 degrees F temperatures. The midwest seemed like a glacier.

Actually, it was kind of scary driving in such brutal cold. There were four of us in the car, making it tough for the defroster to keep the windows clear. But, as anyone who has driven to Florida can testify, there isn't much to see until the landscape of Kentucky appears. So frosty windows didn't matter much.

We left one of our passengers in Champaign at the University of Illinois campus (where the Badgers beat the Illini in men's basketball the following night). It was a balmy -20 degrees F when we left there at 10:00 a.m.

The ride was uneventful, thankfully, until we were east of Nashville, where we finally caught up to the trailing edge

of a formidable winter storm. After forty slow-going miles, we pulled off I-24 and found a motel with vacancies. We weren't quite as lucky in finding an open restaurant, but chow wasn't, at that point, our paramount concern.

Roads were. Everything you've ever heard about travel in modest snow in the south is true. They have no snow plowing or removal equipment, no experience and no commitment to keep roads open. And they move as slow as the stereotype. The game plan, it seems obvious, is to let the snow and ice melt.

Temperatures hovered in the 0 to 20 degrees F range, so neither snow nor ice was going anywhere. Rick and Cheryl Lange left the day before, as did Jeff and Linda Parks, and they were caught in worse conditions than we were. Josh Lepine left the day after we did and roads hadn't improved. In fact, he spent the night in a motel with no water—just frozen pipes!

The bitter cold that gripped our part of the country preceded us into Florida. It was panic city in central Florida as the freezing weather put the citrus crop at risk. Schools closed, business slowed, pipes burst and people griped about the heavy rain and the cold. The

lows on Sunday night (2/4/96) got down to 20 degrees F, and tourists don't travel to the tourist spots to enjoy 40 degree F daytime highs. Despite the discomfort of the locals, snowbirds like me thought it was all rather pleasant. I just put on a jacket. It was a little chilly, but hardly arctic.

The unusually poor weather seemed a bad omen for conference week. This was a city many families had waited months to visit. DisneyWorld, Sea World, ocean beaches and all the other destinations that attract visitors aren't much fun when all your energy goes into shivering and trying to keep warm.

Fortunately, patience in Florida this time of year will most often result in the return of sunny and warm days, and by the end of the week, it was indeed 80 degrees F.

If Orlando and the surrounding area make this a great convention site for those who bring families, then the convention center itself makes it close to the best of all the cities we visit for that reason. It is big and clean and fairly well planned. I heard some bellyaching about parking arrangements, but by and large most customers (i.e. GCSAA members) seemed well satisfied.



The Orange Co. convention center is expensive, impressive and elegant, both outside,



and inside.

But talk about poor urban planning—International Drive reminded me of Odana Road in Madison, times ten. It is jammed with cars and people and fast food restaurants and it is impassible at times. Walking was the best way to navigate around. Who couldn't use the exercise during conference week, anyway?

I have never been to a GCSAA conference I didn't enjoy or benefit from. It is just that some are better than others. The 1996 edition was better than most. I am glad I went, and so are most I've visited with.

OBSERVATIONS AND OPINIONS

WINNER: Book signings. This is an entirely enjoyable experience at conference, for everybody, not just bibliophiles like me. It is fun to meet and visit with an author; it adds to the pleasure of reading his book.

LOSER: Corporate sponsorship. Maybe it is a sign of the times, but I loathe the whole concept of corporate sponsorship GCSAA is stuck on. I know—go to DisneyWorld and it is the FedEx Space Mountain. Turn on TV and it is the Kodak/Crysler/General Mills Classic Invitational Tourney. And go to conference and it is the Rainbird/Ciba/Jacobsen/Lebanon environmental session. It ought to be the GCSAA environmental session. The money goes for food and booze and treats for those there, even though GCSAA members not in Orlando pay and non-GCSAA members pay in the price adjustments made in sponsor products. It seems to me that if we can afford to be at conference, we can afford our own Miller Lite and BBQ chicken wings.

Think about it. If all the money spent on sponsorship went to a more legitimate purpose—research, for example—everybody would benefit. The purpose would be higher and more fair. For me, corporate sponsorship doesn't pass the smell test. It is ripe for abuse somewhere along the line. And somebody will abuse it. You wonder—what will be up for sponsorship next? How far will it go? How tempting might it become?

I don't feel enriched by corporate sponsorship, cannot sense that the conference experience is better for it, and wouldn't miss it for a minute. And it is not a great bargain for the sponsors. Pop quiz: who sponsored the President's Reception? What did Milorganite sponsor? See what I mean? I don't remember either. The

whole concept of putting the touch on businesses we deal with reminds me of lobbyists and politics. The polls make it pretty clear what the public things of those two areas of American life.

UPPER: Lou Holtz and his unscripted one hour inspirational talk to us. One of the best. Plus, I got him to sign my book he wrote—The Fighting Spirit.

DOWNER: By law changes that allow Mother GCSAA to take autonomy from state chapters that affiliate. It is about money and centralized power for a handful of politicians and bureaucrats. It is about excluding state golf course superintendents from their state chapter for unstated reasons. A void is going to be created by this legislation, and something will be found to fill the void, from state to state. It always happens, and in some states, there's a chance it will happen right away. Sad development in my mind.

WINNER: Florida weather at the end of the week and beyond. That is what makes Orlando so popular as a conference site. Loved those 80 degree F days!

LOSER: Florida weather at the beginning of the week. If I wanted to

be cold, I'd have voted for Milwaukee as a conference site.

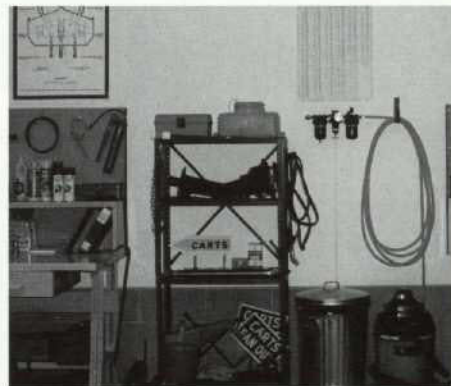
BIG WINNER: USGA Green Section meeting on Sunday afternoon. It was simply excellent. What a great way to spend your time at conference. Congratulations (and thanks!) to Jim Snow and his crew. Where in the world would the golf turf world be without these guys?

The best turf tips are always great; add in a vintage Jim Latham speech, an insightful hour with Dr. Paling and his theories on risk, and you had a first class program.

Some wondered how the timing might affect attendance. It didn't seem to hurt it at all.

BIG LOSER: The turf tour was well below past experiences and below what I expected. What didn't I like? Well, it left late for beginners. By mid-morning we were an hour behind schedule. A bus got stuck. I love looking at grass, but the garbage at Disney left me cold. It was nearly a waste of time. I would rather have visited Joel Jackson's place. The Scotts Research Farm was too far away, there was too much to see, and the bus ride back and forth wasted

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The Ransomes display area included a shop area,



complete with all necessary amenities,



equipment, and



an office that made you want to go to work. Great effort!

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valuable time that could have been spent at Grand Cypress or another of the great Disney courses or at Bay Hill or any number of others.

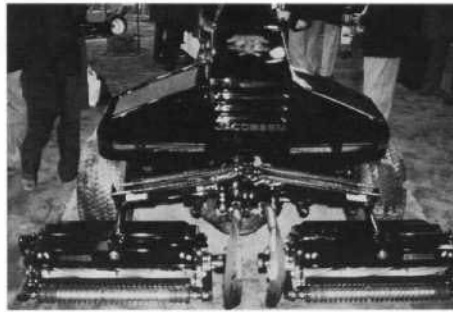
WINNER: Steve Millett. He won the Collegiate Turf Bowl competition! Wow—what an honor for one of our newest GRASS ROOTS authors. On Wisconsin!!

LOSER: Problems in seminar rooms. In one room, Dr. Houston Couch could not show slides because the lights wouldn't dim. Why isn't this checked out ahead of time? Why can't it be fixed? The building was big enough that there just had to be another room to use somewhere. I mean, we paid in full. That should include facilities that work. Or a rebate.

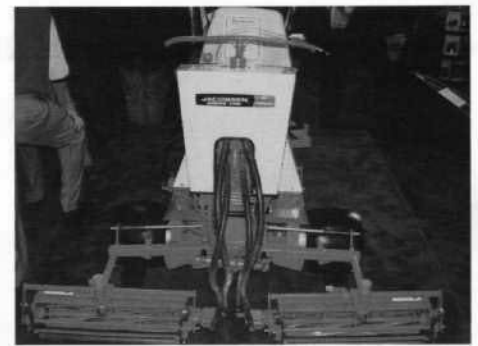
In Ron Forse's seminar, the microphone didn't work for the first hour and it wasn't until the half day seminar was almost over that the pointer light worked. For the money we pay and the time we invest and for the effort of the instructors, why aren't these simple problems solved? You cannot control the weather for the golf tournament, but it seems that somebody could make sure the lights dim.

SAY IT AIN'T SO: I overheard some guys talking while we were waiting for Lou Holtz to arrive (his tardiness was made tolerable by the tremendous message he brought) and they claimed negotiations were underway to secure O.J. Simpson for next year's opening session. The logic was his celebrity, his love of golf, his past athletic accomplishment and his speaking ability. Say it ain't so, somebody. Anybody. If it is true, I quit.

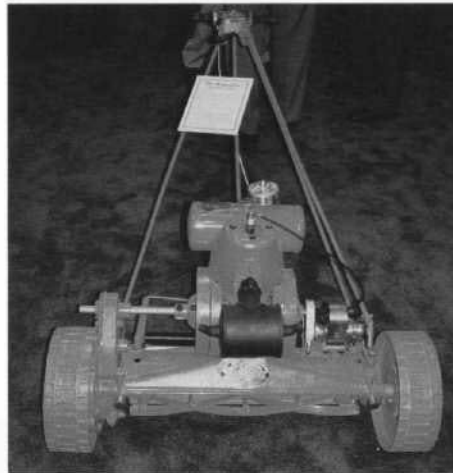
QUESTION: Does Randy Nichols' selection as DSA winner signal the start of a trend where each year we will now be honoring the immediate past president once removed? I hope not. My question isn't about Randy Nichols; I have no idea what kind of job he did as president or what his other contributions have been. I knew him least well—no, not at all, really—of the past dozen or so GCSAA presidents. He may have been a great one—I simply do not know. Why not do like Cooperstown and Canton—no eligibility for past presidents for five years after the last board meeting attended. Or until all of the board members served with have passed through office. It would make the award more meaningful to the recipient and to the members.



Jacobsen was celebrating its 75th anniversary, and showed the ultra-modern, black Tri-King...



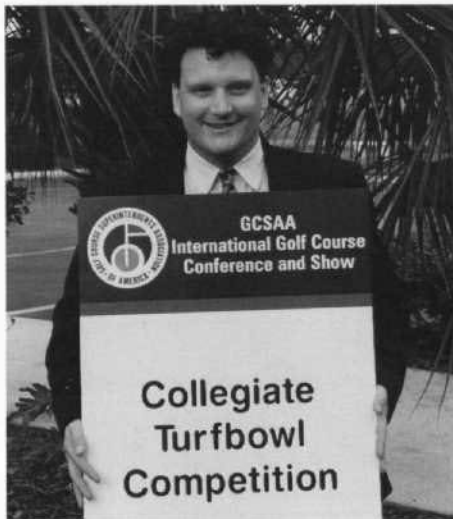
the first triplex greensmower from the late 1960s,



the very early 4-acre walking mower, and



a complete hat collection, going back five years beyond my first Jake hat! Super display!



Steve Millett, winner of the GCSAA Collegiate Turfbowl Competition. Congratulations to this proud Badger!



One of my favorite people of all time—Terry Ward. He's an all-American hero!



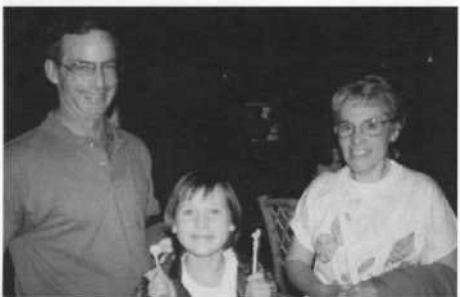
The turf tour visited Grand Cypress' shop, where we saw fuel storage and containment facilities second to none.



What's a trip to Orlando without a visit to Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club? When you are the boss, you can park your golf car anywhere you want!



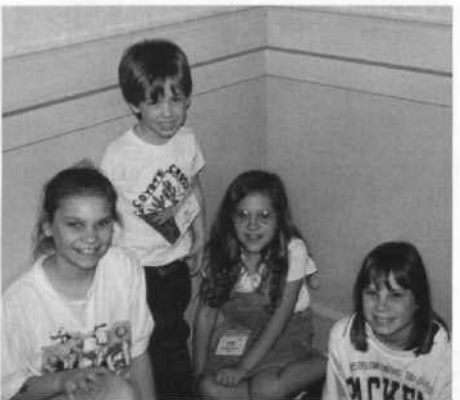
Oscar Peterson, Tom Parent and Mike Lee at the alumni gathering. Peterson and Lee were arguing the virtues of the Danes and Norwegians, respectively. Mick won easily.



The Parks Family—Jeff, Ginny and Linda.



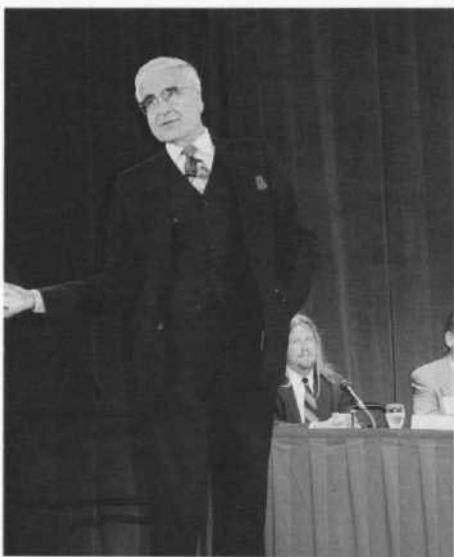
"Virtual reality" in the Toro irrigation booth!



A happy bunch—the Lange and Handrich kids. Joey Lange was exhausted from so much fun!



David Noltner got his copy of "The Fighting Spirit" signed by the author and our keynote speaker, Lou Holtz. Dave gave Holtz an update on Barry Alvarez!



Arthur Miller, well known from PBS appearances, moderated the environmental general session.



Lee Bruce made the trip to Orlando for business and the chance to see friends like JoAnn and Randy Smith.

UPPER: Frank Rossi had a big part in conference this year—chairman of the Northern Exposure Session, a member of the Environmental General Session, and a speaker in the Grow-in Pains program. Nice work.

HIGHLIGHT: The GRASS ROOTS won "best" in its category (size and volunteer editor). The award is particularly meaningful because it was done by peer judging—the other chapter publication editors made the winning selections. It is high compliment to our excellent writers, our outstanding artist, our super cartoonist, the staff at Kramer Printing, our advertisers who pay the bills and the business managers over the last year. Talk about teamwork!

BANQUET: I loved the family reunion theme. The food was excellent—best ever at the banquet. The entertainment wasn't what I would have selected, but you have to say they were loud. And give credit to the lead singer—at least he had a red and white guitar. Giddyup and yahoo, Bubba! Tom Fazio was just perfect as an Old Tom Morris award winner. Stroke of genius in selecting him.

On the negative side—the operatives at the head table have got to cut down on the hot air. It is time to resurrect the trap door suggestion: when the first word leaves the lips of a speaker, hit the stop watch. Anyone still talking at the 3:00 minute mark leaves the stage via a trap door. Another option—a good sized hook.

I know there is business to do and individuals to honor, but it goes on way too long. The sad thing about the long windedness is that the audience shuts it out. Watch sometime—after three minutes, people get restless and start talking with friends at their own table, paying no attention to head table activity. They simply quit listening.

Fortunately, what matters most is the company of good friends and the chance to relax and visit as we approach the eve of another season.

SPECIAL AWARD: Best Display at Show is a tough call this year. Two Wisconsin companies—Jacobsen and Ransomes—were neck and neck in the competition. Ransomes created a real life shop, complete with every detail. Jacobsen is celebrating its 75th anniversary and incorporated history highlights into the Orlando display. I loved both of them. In all honesty, I cannot select one better than the other. So these two wonderful companies earn a tie for giving us such enjoyable booths to visit. Thanks!

BEST EFFORT: I won't even pretend to be impartial here, but a good word goes to David Bishop. I have gotten to know him the past couple of years and he's earned my respect. The bookstore—at conference and through the mail—are his work. And if you took time to surf the net, you saw GCSAA on the worldwide web. That is Dave. So are the valuable info packs he's assembled. And a thousand other things.

I'm not sure how much practical day-to-day use many of us will make of the net, but we needed to be there. Nancee Torkelson does an excellent job with David in the wide-ranging responsibilities they have.

You may not have recognized him sans mustache. With it, he was headed to the NFL Hall of Fame as Dan Dierdorf's identical twin!

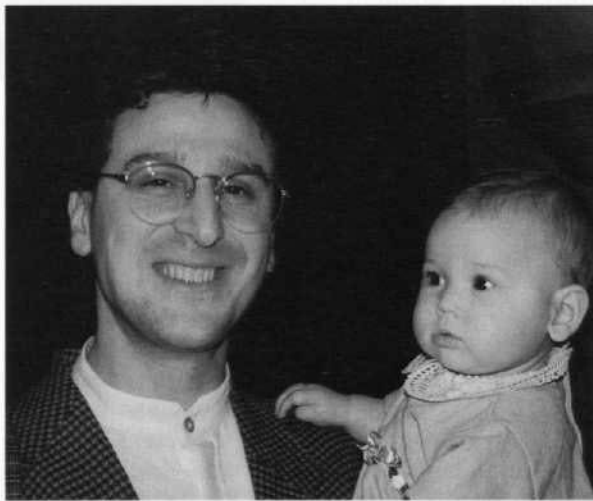
HOW DO I LOOK? Better than in past years, if you shopped the GCSAA merchandise store. I'm not much of a fashion plate or clothes horse (you'll never mistake me for a

golf pro—I still wear a belt and keep my collar folded down and I wear socks), but the shirts and jackets and other gear looked stylish and better than the boring early 1980's look of recent stores—you know, plain dark

blue shirt with a logo the size of a softball over the left chest pocket. They were suitable for wear while making an irrigation repair, but uptown they weren't. Somebody did a little looking around, and it showed. 🙄



Randy Smith, Steve Millett and Doug Maxwell relaxing in The Peabody Hotel.



Nicole Rossi is far better looking than her dad!



Mary Worzella and Lois Latham visited at the WGCSA reception.

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