

"I'll see you in October, Honey!"

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

It really was April Fools Day when we opened our course. The temperature was a balmy 75 degrees, the course was very dry - dry enough for golf cars - and the putting greens were, well, green after we removed the dead leaf tissue left over from the winter.

We all felt it - "Hooray! Hooray! It's opening day!" Fresh spring air filled our lungs as we experienced the first real physical activity since late last fall, and it really felt good. And we were happy.

Until Saturday and Sunday when snow fell and temperatures plummeted, all accompanied by lightning and thunder. We were, as

Robert Frost once wrote, right back in the middle of winter again. There was more snow on April 7 and 8, and schools in some areas of Wisconsin closed schools for a day or two.

Oh, it is spring and this is Wisconsin and we are used to the season coming in fits and starts. At least we had the one last chance to wrap up any shop work that remained. It also gave Otto, Vavrek, Schaller, Van Liere, Shaw, Dupont and Miller time to do some last minute planning for the WSGA Masters trip! When the five inches of snow that fell on our course finally did melt, boy, was the

tender turf ever green!

That snow was to be the last for southern Wisconsin, but up north there was more due in that third week of April. Salesmen friends who call on me expressed marvel at how tightly there business is tied to the weather, probably nearly as much as ours is. "People don't think much about golf when there is snow on the ground, the wind is blowing and the temperatures are in the 30s," one lamented. "And you guys don't want to see us if there aren't any players on the courses."

The weather amplified that old Wisconsin adage, "Don't blink, you




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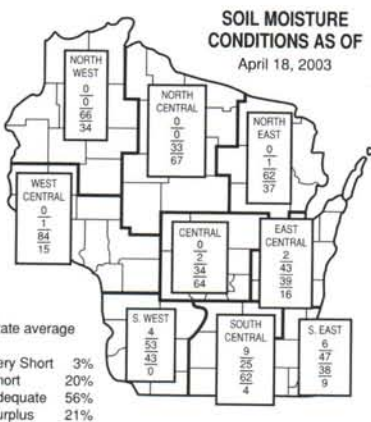
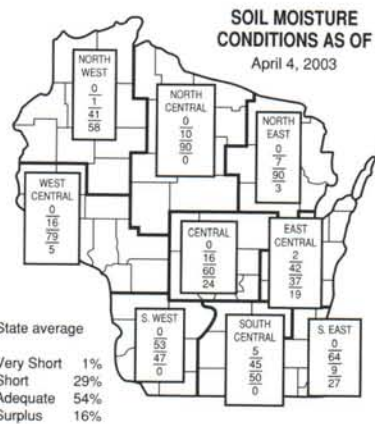
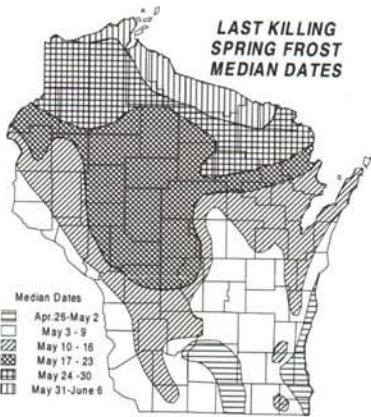
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could miss a change in the weather.”

We are able to see very clearly what impact the dry last half and 2002 and the dry winter past have had on lake levels. Our course is on the shore of Lake Mendota and we are acutely aware of water levels since that is the source of our irrigation water. The last I saw the lake so low was in the bicentennial year of 1976 when we experienced a significant drought.

The dry weather has left other inland lakes, especially in southern Wisconsin, in the same plight. To exacerbate conditions, we have had a lack of spring rain and some lakes are as much as two feet below the norm. While boaters and fishers have concerns, so do those of us who need that water for irrigation. We can only pray for some catch up precipitation.

Soil moisture conditions, as recorded by the Wisconsin Ag

Stats Service, are shown here for your records.

Dr. Steve Millett is on the edge of his busy season as head of the WDATCP Gypsy Moth Control Program. Some parts of central Wisconsin are bracing for a big battle against these tree foliage-eating beasts.

Areas with a good population of oak trees, dry and sandy soil, and gypsy moth numbers that have gone up for the past several years will see the problem get worse. WDATCP will spray 331,000 acres on 47 sites in 12 counties this spring. I was relieved to learn our course is in one of the spray sites, although that is also an indication of a bad moon on the rise. That compares with 330,000 acres last year on 99 sites and in 22 counties. Sites will be treated with either *Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki* (Btk) or pheromone flakes.

PRECIPITATION

Departure from mean, in inches, Oct. 15, 2002 to Feb. 28, 2003:



SOURCE: Midwestern Regional Climate Center, National Weather Service

DROUGHT OUTLOOK

Large-scale forecast through May, 2003:



Three sites in Adams county will be sprayed with *Nucleopolyhedrosis virus* (NPV), a naturally occurring gypsy moth virus. NPV causes the caterpillar to become soft and limp and is often called the "wilt disease." It is harmless to humans, just like the Btk and pheromone flakes.

The moths spread to the Midwest from the northeast U.S. They are native to Europe, Asia and North Africa and were introduced into the U.S. in 1869. They have been a problem since then.

I thought the severe winter might kill some of the egg masses since they over winter above-ground. My suspicion is that the cold temperatures weren't persistent enough.

A Madison legislator has introduced a bill to the legislature that would require a permit for high capacity wells that pump more than 100,000 gallons of ground water per day. He says it would close a loophole that allows hi cap well construction in rural areas with little state oversight.

Similar legislation was defeated last year, but support from state agricultural interests for the proposal is growing, increasing chances of passage. Such a law obviously could have some impact on golf courses.

Participation in the legislative process will help position agricultural enterprises, which includes golf courses, more favorably. The catalyst for the proposal has been the bottled water industries and the fears of ground water supplies being depleted by them.

While there were six guys feeling awfully lucky after the Masters trip drawing at the spring business meeting, another one of our group had some good luck at the GCSAA show last February. Randy Swonger participated in a

survey by Milorganite Marketing, became eligible for a drawing, and was one of three participants to win a Compaq 3655 PDA.

He will have to keep it at work so his wife doesn't appropriate it!

A report by the Southern Growth Policies Board and funded by the National Science Foundation recognizes the UW - Madison as among the top 12 of all U.S. universities that seek to invigorate state economies through technology transfer and start-up companies born from university research. The report describes the UW - Madison as "a story of an extraordinarily successful research university that has also nurtured a long-standing mission of service to its state, while at the same time creating a very entrepreneurial culture and some novel approaches to technology transfer."

It seems that the toughest job ahead for our state's land grant university will be surviving the severe cuts proposed by Gov.

Doyle. He's turning out to be a piece of work - switching positions once in office, taking huge sums of money from the Indians in exchange for gambling for perpetuity, cronyism, and more than I care to think about. But the worst is his proposal to balance the budget by butchering the UW System budget.

Especially in light of the above. Maybe he hasn't read it. Or maybe he is just another short-sighted idiot politician.

There are few things more pleasurable to me than watching a beautiful Monarch butterfly floating lazily by on a summer day. Scientists were fearful of how common that pleasantry might be after hard rains and freezing cold in the central states of Mexico last year killed hundreds of millions of the Monarchs. The kill in January 2002 decimated 75 - 80% of those butterflies that made the 2000 mile journey to the eastern U.S and Canada.

But for once there is good news



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to report. This winter observers estimated 200 to 500 million Monarchs were hanging in enormous clumps in a 20 acre area of a forest of fir trees.

It is a mystery to entomologists, but the butterflies have, for whatever reasons, recovered. And we will have them to enjoy this summer after all.

The Agricultural Clean Sweep Program reached a major milestone on March 20th when it collected its two millionth pound of hazardous ag chemicals.

Clean Sweep is a joint effort among Wisconsin counties and the WDATCP to provide free or low cost hazardous waste collection for farmers and businesses. That, of course, has included golf

courses.

The Ag Clean Sweep Program became operational in 1990 as a pilot program in three counties and became statewide in 1992. Tons of unused pesticides have been collected and properly processed since then.

Deep appreciation and congratulations go to those responsible for this critical and valuable state program.

It was discouraging to read that CNH Global plans to close its 100-year old foundry in Racine in 2004. One hundred employees will lose their jobs. It hurts tractor lovers like me to our core.

Of course, for over 90 years this was a J.I. Case foundry, casting parts for that great Wisconsin

company's line of agricultural equipment, including a Case 300 I was in love with as a young kid.

Merger upon merger upon merger have made Jerome Case's company almost unrecognizable anymore. It may be a global economy we operate in nowadays, and maybe plant closings like this make business sense. But I have trouble getting past the heart-break of those directly affected, and the loss of another piece of our proud Wisconsin manufacturing history.

Congratulations to Ryan Norton, son of Grass Roots columnist Pat and his wife Sue. He was accepted into this fall's freshman class at the UW - Madison. It is difficult getting into the university, and even more difficult for out-of-state students. Pat and Sue are alums and I know they are pleased to see their firstborn become a Badger.

As significant as his acceptance, to me anyway, is the fact that Ryan will be a ROTC student. He will have a fuller life because of this decision to experience our country's military service.

Events these past months have proven why we should all be proud of our men and women in uniform. The way they performed their duties in Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrate the best about our great country. Watching these mainly young people on the news each night for six weeks show courage and restraint and good judgment sent shivers up my spine. And they made me proud, once again, to be a veteran of military service.

So young Ryan Norton will be joining a select and special group of Americans who protect our freedoms and insure our safety. No wonder Pat and Sue are so proud of him. ♡



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