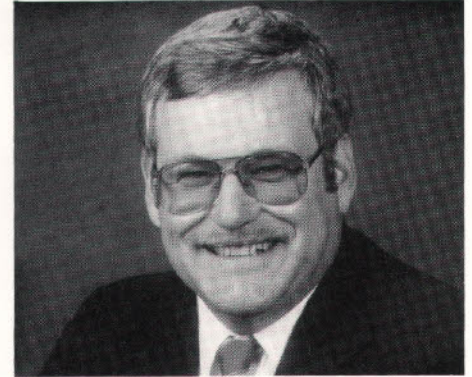




HERE COMES SUMMER

By Roger Bell



As I write this message to you, there has been no significant rainfall on my golf course in recent memory. I have lived in Wisconsin long enough, though, to know that I may have duck ponds on my fairways by the time you read this, however. Weather, like death and taxes, is inevitable—and just about as manageable. There is the distinct possibility that we are facing another hot dry summer like last year.

There is no doubt that weather can make a superintendent's job a real nightmare. Rain, either too much or too little, damaging winds, lightning, humidity or ice can wreak havoc with

even the most proficiently maintained course. On the other hand, grass does quite well on its own if all hazards are excluded—but golf course superintendents wouldn't be needed if golf courses were situated under laboratory-perfect conditions.

Fortunately for us, though, golf courses are built in the real world where there are diseases, drought, and a host of other problems to contend with. We are given the opportunity to demonstrate our talents in the cultivation of fine turf under less than ideal conditions. With our technical knowledge and expertise, we can have our

courses as oases of green—in spite of whatever Mother Nature dishes up.

We don't have to be perfect—we just need to make our courses the best they can be under the conditions we have to work with. We do have to keep our golfers abreast of how we're trying to accomplish that goal and enlist their support. And we need to stay informed about the latest technical and legal developments that affect turf science.

Here comes Summer—with all its challenges and opportunities. Let's get out there and give it our best shot—and, oh yes—wouldn't you love to see about an inch of rain as a good soaker?

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LESSONS IN "REAL WORLD 101"

By Monroe S. Miller

I was doing some leisure reading a while ago and came across an entry Commodore Perry made in his log when he was trying to reach the North Pole some 75 years ago. He had traveled an entire day toward the Pole, pushing his sled dogs to their limit. That night he checked his bearings to determine his latitude and was shocked to find he was much farther south than he had been at the start of that long day.

It seems that all day long he had been moving north on a huge iceberg that was being drawn southward by a strong ocean current.

This entry shook me to a reality about the NOER CENTER that I previously hadn't focused on. Because of proximity and interest, I have been involved in trying to get this turfgrass research facility built for years. Frustration has been a big part of that involvement and has been primarily the result of my impatience and naivete. About the time Tom Harrison and I think we'd moved a good step forward, we would have to take two steps back. Why? Maybe we had forgotten to tell the WTA Board what we were up to. Or we would forget to mention costs to the UW golf course committee. Or we had failed to visit with the Chancellor's office or the CALS Dean.

We certainly had the charge to move ahead, as members of the NOER CENTER Committee. But the failure to keep others posted of our progress on the project frequently doubled our work. As we checked our bearings to determine the "latitude" of this project, we found that we were "farther south" than we were the previous month. LESSON: Inform and communicate.

Another well of frustration has been the reluctance of many golf groups and golf clubs to embrace the NOER project at all or near a level we know they should and are capable of doing. I've written about the tax plan we dreamed about and then gave up. I didn't mind that so much because I felt there would be great value in that notion. But once

we hit the streets to "sell" the research facility I was somewhat shocked to experience the disinterest some have. Regardless of where you live in America, your life has been enriched in a substantial and general way by your community's level of civilization. That level of cultural and technological development is due in a large part to the country's state universities. Everyone has profited from one of those land grant institutions. The University of Wisconsin-Madison is part of that network and even if one never was a student on that campus, even if one's children were never students in Madison, his community's life is higher and richer because of this school. This is a truth; I know it, believe it, advocate it. What our state would be today without the University of Wisconsin is unthinkable to *anyone who knows the institution*.

Herein is the problem. The NOER CENTER will be of great value to this institution because it will broaden its capabilities. For many, that is reason enough to support the NOER project. But I've encountered roomfuls of people in our state, intelligent and competent and well versed in the turfgrass sciences, who have never heard how the state land grant universities were founded, who have no idea about what the vast total of their students has been, nor what a true miracle it is, was, and will forever be for Wisconsin and the whole country that they came into existence. LESSON: The fact that the NOER CENTER will enhance the already formidable abilities of our University of Wisconsin is not reason enough to expect total support of it. We need to demonstrate how each golf player will prosper from this project.

It seems obvious, now that we are this far into the fund-raising program for a turfgrass research facility, that our job is one of education. We do not need to educate ourselves — if we don't know the depth of the need we are in serious trouble. Rather, it comes down to educating the end users of

turfgrass research. Once educated, persuasion for financial support shall become a straightforward proposition. In our situations, the end user is the golf player. I've suffered discouragement in this task to the point where I've had to do serious thinking about it. This matter of education and persuasion really is a matter of salesmanship. Curt Larson, Ed Devinger, Neil Richter, et. al. undoubtedly could have told me this many years ago, but I think there is value in learning the lesson independently, from the school of hard knocks.

Salesmanship requires enthusiasm; we have that. But it also requires a cool perspective that we may not always have. Emotional pleas, I've discovered, will not work; tough questions must be answered with openness, honesty and objectivity. A sure route to bad salesmanship is failure to view the NOER CENTER with a candid eye. We must "move away" and look at it with a stance similar to those we are visiting with, in hopes of garnering financial support. LESSON: Salesmanship of the NOER CENTER requires an objectivity we cannot offer if we become too intimately involved. Stand back a bit.

Probably the final lesson any of us will learn from this adventure will occur when it is all over. Then we will know how much easier the job could have been, knowing at the outset what we know at the end. But then, isn't that one of life's greatest lessons?

The **GRASSROOTS** is a bi-monthly publication of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association. Editor and Publisher — Monroe S. Miller, Editorial Staff and Business Affairs — Rodney Johnson — Sheboygan Country Club, and Michael Semler — Cherokee Country Club. Printed in Madison, Wisconsin by Kramer Printing. No part or parts of the **GRASSROOTS** may be reprinted without expressed written permission of the Editor.



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The USGA Should be Ashamed of Itself

By Rob Schultz

I hate bumper stickers. I hate folks who put stupid bumper stickers on their cars.

There's one exception. I have a friend who drives a beat-up 1960 Falcon. He's a red-neck from Kentucky and he didn't care about the car. It had rust everywhere, had one headlight that worked, you could see the street through the holes in the floorboards. Well, he had a great sticker on what was left of his rear bumper. It said, "Ask me about Mary Kay Cosmetics."

I used to vow that I'd never put a sticker on my car, even if it was one of those AAA types. But this spring I broke my vow. I placed a sticker on my bumper because it meant a great deal to me at the time.

It was the sticker for the USGA, of which I used to be a proud associate member.

Now I'm looking for a knife to peel the sucker off. I'm still an associate member, but I'm not proud of it anymore.

The USGA is supposed to represent what golf is all about: Class, integrity, honesty. Plus, it's an organization that's supposed to be for everyone who golfs, not just the pros.

But in the current *Golf Digest*, all that is blown out of the water by this allegedly prestigious organization which, in my opinion, has turned the U.S. Open into a sham.

In a commentary by *Golf Digest* editor Jerry Tarde, an anonymous USGA official is quoted as saying, "Sure it bothers me that somebody like Andy North, who's one of the worst ball-strikers on tour, has won the U.S. Open twice, but how do you figure it?"

That is a statement that lacks everything the USGA is supposed to stand for. And to top it off, it comes from some naive boob who doesn't have the guts to stand behind his quote publicly.

North certainly does not have the charisma of a Watson, Nicklaus, Norman or Ballesteros, but to unceremoniously undress the guy for winning two U.S. Opens takes unmitigated gall.

"What did he do it for?" North asked during a long phone conversation recently. "What did I do to deserve that?" If I had lost two U.S. Opens after having the chance to win, I could see it. If I was a jerk to everyone I could see it. But that's not the case." North takes pride in staying in the shadows of the PGA Tour. Part of it is done consciously because of the bad press he's received after winning two Opens. It's also due to his rash of injuries that have forced his game to deteriorate to the point where few outside Madison care about what he's doing.

That has led some to misunderstand North, who has a tendency to shoot from the hip and infuriate some obtuse media types when they do question him. After each Open victory, some have taken him to task for it because he doesn't come across like a Zoeller, Crenshaw or Watson. For that reason, the public hasn't gotten to know him because he isn't "good copy".

Ask any golfer who the most famous Andy is on PGA Tour and he or she will answer "Bean." It's never North. Bean, you see, wrestles alligators. That's good copy.

And that's who the public wants to win the U.S. Open and the Masters—who the media likes and publicizes. Golf is unlike almost any other sport in that regard. Few rarely root for the underdog.

That brings us back to the USGA. It is supposed to set an example, set the stage for golf in the future, help the media get away from just glorifying the chosen few at the sake of everyone else. But what this organization is doing is moving golf back 40 years.

The USGA used to set up the Open so only Ben Hogan could win. Today, it sets up the courses so hard that nobody can win; everybody loses except one. And that one merely survives. And nobody's a better survivor than North—hence two U.S. Open victories.

The result backfires the USGA's master plan. The USGA reveres in the big names and it's obviously disappointed when one of them doesn't win.

But what is the U.S. Open supposed to be? There are regional and sectional tournaments held all over the country each year allowing the common man to qualify. It's a tournament for the American public; something for everyone who holds a golf club to dream about.

That's precisely what propelled North into golf. "I dreamed about the U.S. Open everyday when I was a kid," North said. "It's the only tournament I really cared about winning."

His adrenaline pumps at the mere mention of it. It's that adrenaline that allowed him to climb the mountain and claim the peak as his own—twice.

If anything, North should be the role model for the general public. But the USGA shoots that down and just criticizes him for "ruining" their event. What the USGA is really saying is that the Open is not for all of us. It's for the chosen few.

That's precisely what I hate about golf. It's becoming, again, a sport for the so-called elite. I hate that more than bumper stickers.

The USGA should be bowing its head in shame over that anonymous quote about North. Apologies should be forthcoming. Until then, at least I can start scraping that sticker off my car.

When I get it off, I'll give it to my friend with the Falcon. I imagine the USGA only wants those stickers on Cadillacs and Lincolns. But a beat-up Falcon is where it deserves to go. It'll drive those hotsy-totsy USGA goof balls nuts. When it doesn't, I'll know the USGA is finally doing its job.

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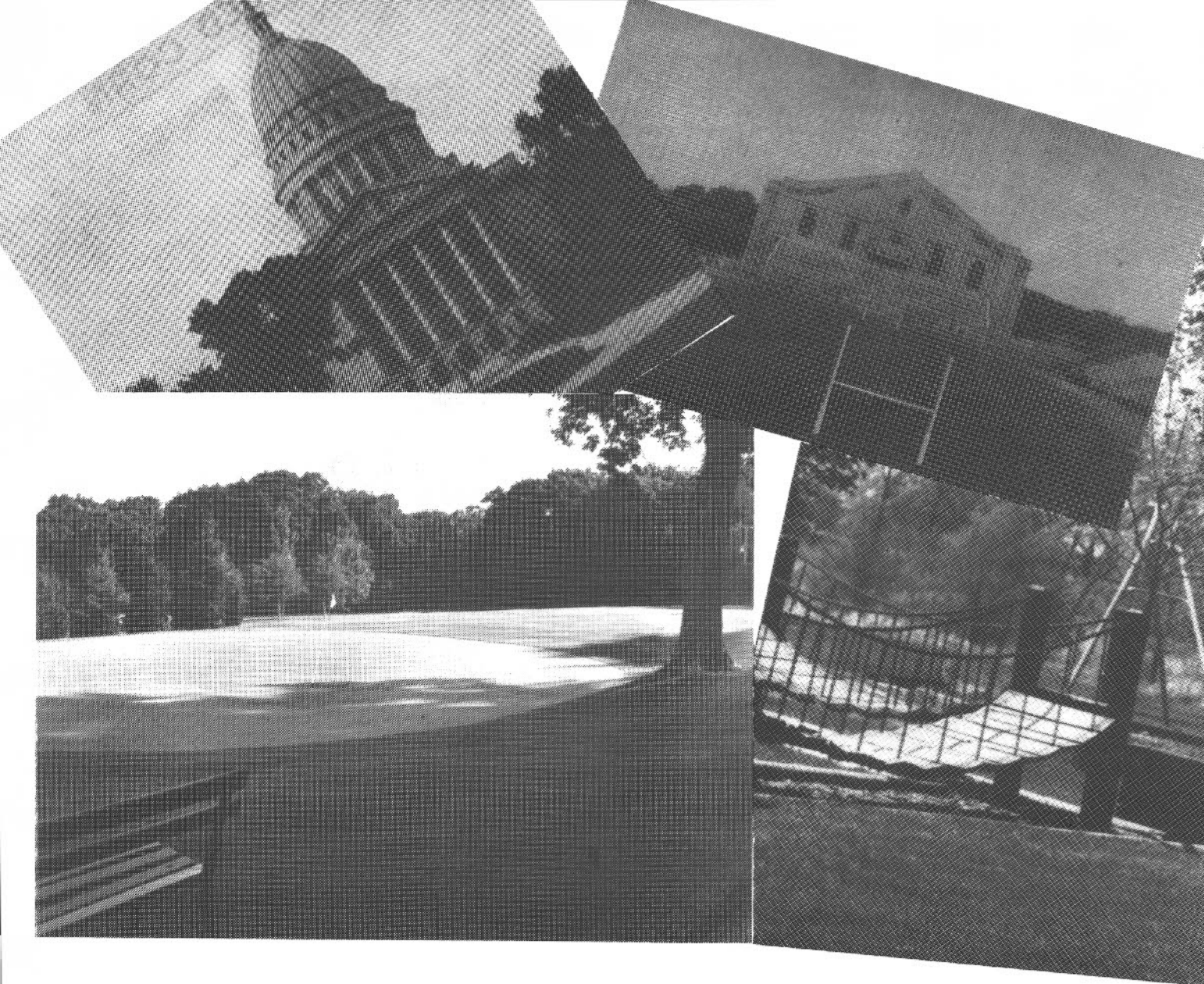
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RAIN

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."

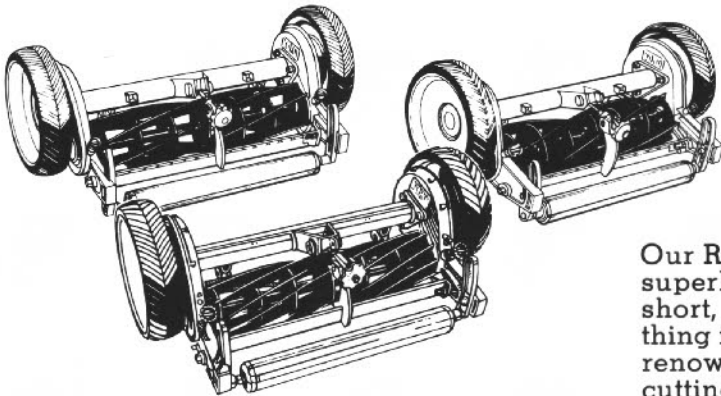
I always hope that when the rain ends, the sky will remain beautifully gray and overcast. The best day has a cool breeze coming from the north off Lake Mendota, offering up a final cleansing of the air. Unfortunately, during those one hundred days of summer, we all know that isn't going to happen.

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

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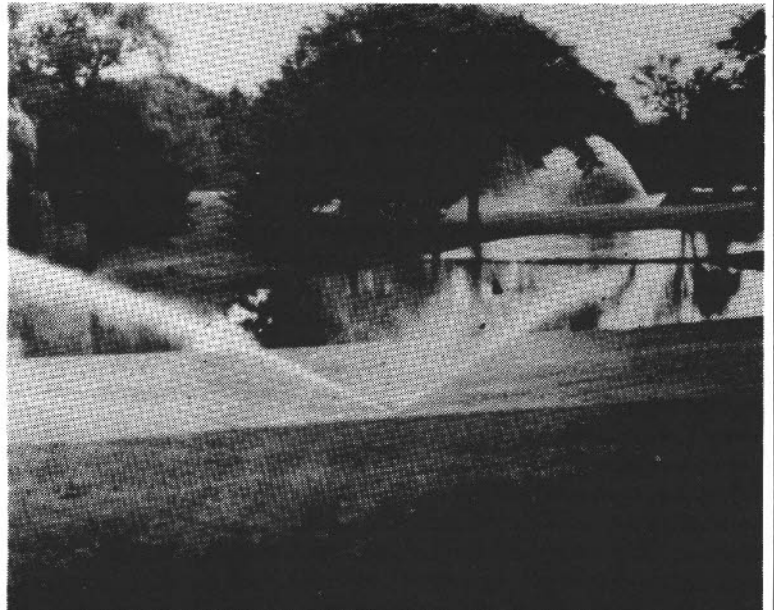
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baskets off. Still, all in all, I wouldn't trade those showers for anything, despite this subsequent attending and inevitable misery.

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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