

# The Grass Roots

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### About the Cover:

Turfgrass research in Wisconsin moves ahead at the O.J. NOER TURFGRASS RESEARCH and EDUCATION FACILITY in a strong partnership between the UW-Madison and the WGCSA.

Cover artwork by Jennifer Eberhardt.

"Every morning in Africa a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must out-run the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle. When the sun comes up you'd better be running."

— Anonymous

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(Left to Right) Scott Schaller, Mike Handrich, Tom Schwab, Bruce Worzella, Bill Knight, Mark Kienert, Mike Semler, Joe Kuta and Pat Norton.

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## ENTHUSIASM: *Preparations For The Season*

By Michael Semler



We have survived another winter and I must admit that I am looking forward to the beginning of another year. I do not measure the work year like most businesses, with January 1st being the new year. I measure the new year by the golfing season in Wisconsin. So by my measure we are entering a "New Year".

Every spring, about this time, my enthusiasm level is at its highest. I have spent the majority of the winter in preparation of this "New Year". However, unlike most New Year celebrations, I didn't go out and celebrate the night before. I relished this one for the past 4 or 5 months with my "on paper" planning and preparation.

All golf course superintendents know that part of the allure of being in this business is these "New Year" celebrations. These seasonal changes

always keep us looking forward to something new and different. I have always felt that this is one of the little known treasures of our profession. For it seems that as soon as we become tired of one season, another new, different and exciting change is around the corner. These changes keep us from becoming tired of the same old routines with a "New Year" every 3 to 5 months.

Back in November, I was looking forward to the chance to see the new equipment that would be available for 1994. I relished the chance to listen to Kussow, Rossi, Meyer, Koval and others, at the annual winter symposiums and conferences. I looked forward to the planning and preparation necessary for the upcoming year. A new staff, new modes of operation and the chance to improve the golf course in dramatic fashion (at least on paper), were some of the plans I made this past winter. I even had the

chance to take a vacation with the family away from the golf course.

All that seems so long ago, and now doesn't carry the same allure as it did in November. I feel it is time for a "New Year". So much for the paper improvements I made during the winter months, it is time to put them into action on the golf course.

I truly enjoy the months of spring. I'll have plenty of time in the coming season to implement the improvements I have planned for many months. Certainly, there is a heightened tension and activity level around the golf course. Sometimes a mistake or two will be made, but so will many improvements.

"New Year" celebrations raise our spirits with the coming of new events and the fruits of our winter planning. Without even knowing it, and with the lack of a hangover, we have entered a new year and a new season. So Enjoy! 🏌️



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# WISCONSIN AWAKENS TO A PERFECT SEASON'S BEGINNING

By Monroe S. Miller

I was thinking, during Easter Sunday church service, that this is a holiday all golf course superintendents should enjoy, regardless of individual beliefs. Isn't this time of the year a Resurrection time for all of us?

The dreary, straw colored ground we like so much was stirring to life. The grass plants were showing hints of emerald. Tulips were pushing up from brown beds. Buds on silver maples and poplars were fat. Who among us wasn't relieved and inspired to see signs of life from that which looked so lifeless? Heaven help us if we ever lose that sense of marvel and wonder.

Golf course superintendents from all corners of Wisconsin are smiling this spring. There is an occasional report of winter damage, but most often I hear the course "never looked better."

I also hear our bad spring of a year ago has moved east, giving colleagues in New England and in the mid-Atlantic areas damage from ice and snow mold.

For us the collective sigh of relief means a happy beginning to the 1994 golf season. Congratulations to us; we deserve it!

If the winter of 1993/1994 could be described as anything, most (my age anyway) would call it "an old fashioned winter."

January was bitterly cold everywhere in Wisconsin. In looking for whatever "good" there might be in arctic temperatures, most WGCSA members would hope for reduced insect populations during the 1994 season. We'll know about that for sure soon enough.

Our snowy February was one to write about, at least in our town. It will be recorded as the snowiest month in the recorded history of weather. We were graced with 37 inches of wonderful snow, bringing happiness to cross country skiers, school kids ("School Closed Again Today"), snowmobilers and golf course superintendents.

The previous record at the NWS office in Madison was 32.8" in December of 1987. Also broken were marks for snowiest February (21.9" in 1898), snowiest day in February (11.6" on 2/23/94, erasing the record of 11.5" on 2/26/12), and record snowfalls for the days of 2/5, 2/22 and 2/23.

It was a beautiful winter in many ways. The hope is that it portends of a good - no, make that a great - golf season.

Since we are strongly influenced by the weather, it seems golf course superintendents are always tuned into prediction of what lies ahead.

Pam Knox, state climatologist for the University of Wisconsin Extension Service, says January weather can

give a clue to June, July and August.

"Statistics show if we have a cold January, we tend to have cool, dry summers," she said recently.

When January is cold, summers have below normal temperatures 42 percent of the time and above normal temperatures 27 percent of the time.

If January is cold, summers have below normal rain 42 percent of the time and above normal rainfall 24 percent of the time.

Although I prefer normal precipitation, you'll hear little complaining if cooler temperatures tag along.

Those conditions usually mean less disease pressure; who'd vote against that?

Here's a clarification on the Worker Protection Standard (WPS) that should put your mind at ease. The WPS does NOT cover pesticides "applied on plants that are in ornamental gardens, parks, golf courses, and public or private lawns and grounds that are intended only for decoration or environmental benefit."

Sorry for the false alarm in last issue.

I couldn't help but feel bad when learning of Dinah Shore's death on February 24th.

She was a down-to-earth gal who had millions of fans across America.



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Many of America's golfers knew her best as host of a LPGA event each year.

GCSAA members got to meet her twice at conference. She came to see Patty Berg receive our Old Tom Morris Award in San Francisco in 1986. And she was given the award herself in Anaheim in 1993.

The current crop of entertainers could learn a lot from her about class, gentility and talent. The world, especially the world of golf, will miss her.

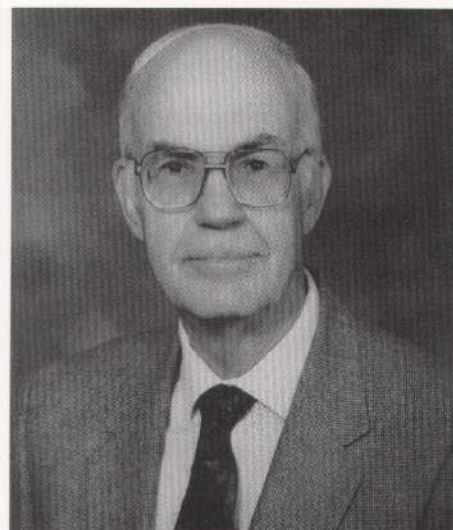
I attended a Reinders Irrigation Seminar at the O.J. NOER Facility in March. The place was designed with that function in mind. The classroom is bright, the furniture is both attractive and comfortable, and everything needed is at hand. It was great.

For those who haven't been in the building for a while, notice the portraits of Professors Newman and Worf next time you do visit. The pictures are a perfect way to honor a couple of special guys.

There he is, in the classroom, looking over every student's shoulder, just



Dr. Bob Newman



Dr. Gayle Worf

like he did for decades at the University. Bob Newman was the one to name the classroom for.

And I was thinking, at the last WTA board meeting, that Gayle was at the head of the conference room, keeping an eye over the directors and inspiring them to make all the right decisions.

Perfect. Just perfect.

Here's hoping everyone has a chance to saddle up and travel to Abbey Springs on April 25th to hear Gary Grigg and some straight talk about the GCSAA. You will also have the opportunity to check up on Dave Smith!

Until then, happy trails to you. 🐾



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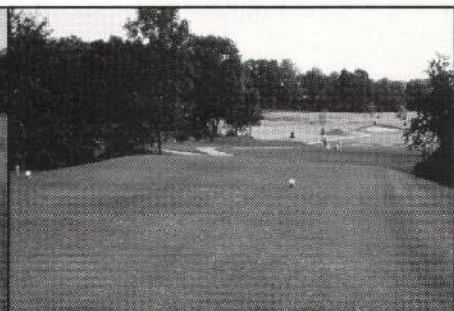
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## Things Learned on the Golf Course Beat

By Monroe S. Miller

Although it isn't my job, I fancy myself a reporter walking the golf course beat in Wisconsin. That's golf COURSE, not golf. Self-assigned, I know. Unofficial, of course. Fanciful? Yeah, okay, that too.

It's a very interesting job, one that's become easier over the years I've been at it. Maybe there has been some recognition of my unofficial status that directs everything from real and legitimate golf course news to golf course gossip my way. It has been a source of material I pick up on the golf course beat.

The golf course beat is just that, and not the GOLF beat. That field is crowded with lots of professional journalists. My beat is uncrowded—I've pretty much got it all to myself—eyes open, radar turned on always, waiting for even a shred of news about golf courses.

It comes from years of editing *THE GRASS ROOTS*. Each issue is a struggle to fill with quality writing and relevant news. Keen observation, quiet leads, clear opinions and a total lack of hesitation to ask questions has gotten a lot of material for our journal.

The other well of interesting stuff about golf courses comes when I am looking for something else. Usually, it is in the Steenbock Library on campus or the Middleton Public Library or the Miller private library. Sometimes I come across interesting bits while visiting with, well, just about anybody.

I have kept notes on these oddball bits and pieces that have come my way over the years. Now I am going to share them with you, or at least some of them, and clean out my file at the same time.

Despite some efforts to the contrary, areas on golf courses are still measured in square feet and acres.

An acre originally totalled as much land as a yoke of oxen could plow in a day. But in the 13th century, an acre's measurement—still official today—

was set by law at 4840 square yards. The word acre derives from the Latin word **ager**, meaning a cultivated field.

Have you ever heard of the "Egg Drop Test"? I read about it in a summary of a lecture given by Dr. Henry Indyke of Rutgers University.

The egg drop test measures the average distance that half the eggs break when dropped on various surfaces. The worse case is blacktop in which eggs break at a height of only 3 inches. Synthetic turf yields an egg drop break point of 18 inches, while natural turf in good condition can give an egg drop height of 15 feet!

I would love to try the egg drop test on some putting greens I've seen around the state. My guess is the break point would vary from 3 inches to 6 inches!

And it also demonstrates why professional football players like natural grass better than synthetic turf.

One of the most pleasant sounds of the last half of summer is the sound of crickets.

Did you know that you can use crickets to estimate the temperature? The formula is very simple. Count the number of chirps and add 39. The sum is the air temperature at the time.

If we look at the word agronomy, we will find it has a long history going back into the Sanskrit. In Sumeria, **a** was the word used for "water" and **agar** was "a watered field". The word **agar** is still in our language, but it has evolved into acre, as noted earlier.

**Agar** went into the Latin as **ager**, "a fertile field" and into the Greek as **ager**, a "field", as distinguished from **agros**, or "wild land". From **agros** the Latin got **agrestis**, meaning "wild", which has come to us as **agrostis**, first for "wild grasses", then as just "grass". **Agar**, through the word roots

**gra** and **gro** gave us the words "grass", "graze", "grain", and "green".

The second root of agronomy is **nomy** and derives in the sense of "to take care of", or "to husband". So, when we consider the meanings that have gone into the word agronomy, we see our agronomic role is to husband or to take care of watered, fertile acres of green grass.

And that's what piqued my interest in the derivation of agronomy—the word says a lot about what golf course superintendents do for a living!

And some think it is tough to get a tee time here at home; they ought to be Dutch.

To play golf on any of the 56 full-sized golf courses in the Netherlands you need a GOLF ABILITY CARD. You can get one, from what I read, by passing a test in which you must hit five reasonably straight drives of at  
(Continued on page 9)

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# (It's about time.)



(Continued from page 7)

least 130 yards, and five approach shots to within 4 1/2 yards of the cup, and five putts from 11 yards with three of them no more than 6 feet from the hole!

Did you ever wonder why we have 18 holes on the golf course instead of 10 or a dozen or even 20? Here's one explanation I read.

When the members of the Society of St. Andrews laid down their rules for the game, the course at St. Andrews (known today as the Old Course) had 12 holes. The first eleven holes played straight out to the end of a peninsula. When the members had played out they returned to the clubhouse by playing the first 10 greens backward plus a green by itself by the clubhouse.

Their round was therefore 22 holes. They played "out" until they reached the "end" hole and played "in" the same holes. If a group going in met a group coming out, preference was given to those playing out. The outgoing holes were marked with a small pin sporting a white flag; incoming holes had a red flag.

In 1764 the Royal and Ancient decided that the first four holes should be converted into two. This resulted in a round being reduced from 22 to 18.

And since the R & A pretty much was the authority of golf then, 18 holes soon were accepted as the standard in Scotland and England and eventually throughout the world.

The early kings of England and Scotland banned golf for many years in those countries because it was crowding out archery as a popular sport, and archery practice was considered essential for war training! I've noticed that golf can be pretty dangerous, too.

**Wisconsin** comes from a Chippewa Indian word that means "grassy place". How true, and how appropriate if you happen to be a golf course superintendent.

The largest tree in the world isn't in some tropical rainforest or in a Pacific coast redwood stand. It is actually in a town.

The largest living tree in the world, in terms of weight, is thought by some

horticulturalists to be a 3,500-year-old Montezuma Cypress (*Taxodium mucronatum*) in the village of Tule, near Oaxaca, Mexico. The tree of Santa Maria Del Tule is 38 feet in diameter, 141 feet high, and measures about 150 feet across its crown.

It has its own full-time caretaker and is in good health.

Since most of us love trees, here is some plant physiology you'll find interesting. The chemical process of photosynthesis causes trees to run a daily temperature! And their trunks are larger in diameter in the daytime when they are pumping sap than at night when they aren't.

The worry over global warming in the past while created a lot of interest in climactic numbers. In the past four decades the nights have been getting warmer but average daytime temperatures haven't budged much.

In those 40 years the average maximum nighttime temperatures have increased 1.5 degrees F., but daytime highs haven't changed.

And those nighttime increases may be due to changes in cloud cover, not "greenhouse gases".

There's another story about the origin of 18 holes for a golf course. According to a story sometimes told in

Scotland, 18 became the conventional number of holes for a course because an early Scottish player found that with a "wee dram" of whiskey taken at each hole, 18 was as far as a standard bottle would go!

Autumn is the favorite season of a lot of golf course superintendents, and the days of Indian summer are almost always welcome.

Indian summer is unmarked on the calendar. It comes in its own time and on its own terms. We hardly need a datebook to recognize it, anyway.

It isn't a season, but rather a fleeting moment in which we can relive a little of the experiences of summer.

There is no proof that I could find that Indian summer originated in New England, but it certainly should have. The first recorded use of the term was by Major Ebenezer Denny in 1794. Encamped a few miles from the present city of Erie, Pennsylvania, he wrote in his journal on that October 13th: "Pleasant weather. The Indian Summer here. Frosty nights."

One thing that is agreed on: Indian summer cannot be declared unless those warm days have been preceded by a good hard freeze.

Another common measurement in golf is the yard. Where did that come from, anyway?

(Continued on page 11)

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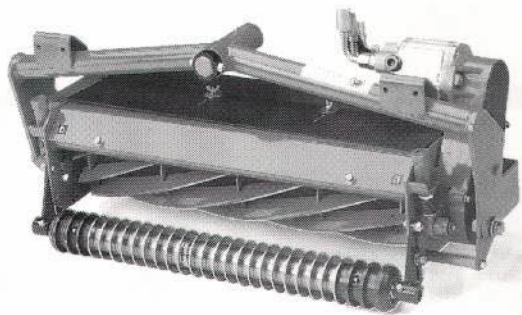
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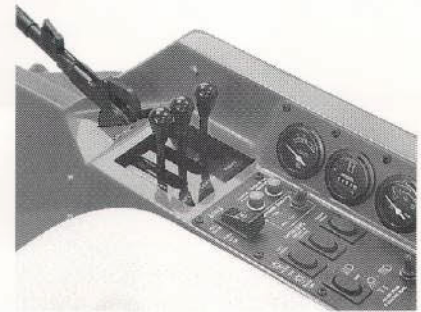






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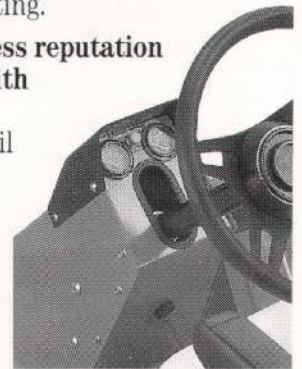


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