

The Grass Roots



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About the Cover:

Golf's greatest hero, Arnold Palmer, is establishing stronger ties in Wisconsin. Mr. Palmer is shown here with Lee Bruce and Pat Shaw. Pat is the golf course superintendent at the Palmer-designed course, The Bog, in Saukville. The Bruce Co. has been involved in the construction of several Palmer-designed courses, both here in Wisconsin and in other states.

Our cover illustrator, Jennifer Eberhardt, has created another masterpiece that records the history of golf course management in Wisconsin.

The poet Walter Scott caught the spirit of the Christmas season in the image of a holiday celebrated in joyful defiance of the winter's storm and cold:

Heap on more wood—
the wind is chill;
But let it whistle as it will,
We'll keep our Christmas merry still."

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Front row (Left to Right): Mark Kienert, Mike Semler, Scott Schaller, Mike Handrich. Back row (Left to Right): Kris Pinkerton, Dave Smith, Joe Kuta, Dave Brandenburg, Bruce Worzella.

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Thank You

By Mike Semler



When I was elected President of the WGCSA in November of 1993, one of the first responses from immediate past president, Bruce Worzella, was a congratulations and a remark about how happy he was to be finished writing his twelve *President's Messages* for THE GRASSROOTS. We both commented on the difficulty of trying to come up with timely remarks that the members would, hopefully, think about and respond to. Now, however, after writing eleven messages with a small amount of difficulty, I am finding the last one to be the most difficult. I suspect that it is due to the fact that it is so final and truly signals the end to my service on the WGCSA board.

I wanted to conclude my tenure with the WGCSA with a few acknowledg-

ments and comments. I must start by thanking all of the past board members who I had served under, because they helped provide the basic guidance and background information to help me form opinions and ideas for my future service with the WGCSA. Secondly, I want to thank all of the present board members; they are the workhorses for the Association and really make the operation go. They made my job of being president very easy because of all of their hard work. And finally, I want to thank all of the members who participated in the Association's activities. Like I have stated in the previous messages, active members make our Association work and make all of boards' work worthwhile. Without all of you, the WGCSA would not be what it is.

The new board for the WGCSA has been elected and I can only hope that their service with our Association will be as rewarding as mine was for me. There is a certain amount of satisfaction that goes along with serving any Association on a voluntary basis. Some of it comes back as favorable comments and suggestions for the work being done. Some satisfaction comes by hoping that you have helped build and support a stronger Association. In the end, the majority of the reward comes purely in personal satisfaction.

In my case, I found all three of these past statements to be true. My service with the WGCSA was both personally rewarding and satisfying. I think I can honestly thank all of you for that! 🙏

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A Golf Course Run By The Players

By Monroe S. Miller

Did you ever get the feeling on your golf course that, sometimes anyway, you just cannot win? It happens to me on occasion and I am usually dumbfounded by it, despite over a quarter of a century in golf turf management.

Don't misunderstand. This isn't a daily emotion, although I will bet the locker room and bar talk concerning golf course issues is constant. Once in awhile a player gets the courage to ask me something like "why are you handwatering that green? Didn't we just spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on one of those computer operated systems? It seems like a waste of time to be out here with a hose and nozzle."

The chronic comment is "you'd never do that on men's day." Also heard too often from the irrational crowd is carping about the course being closed due to rain or frost or

whatever. If you listen too closely or take it too seriously, you'll become a case for the local insane asylum.

Maybe even more frustrating are the comments levelled at young golf course employees. They are intended for me, of course, but I suspect there might be some reason they don't want to bring it up to me personally. Who knows?

It's not that you can ignore complaints; you have to react to those that are legitimate. But a lot of what golf course superintendents hear has to be ignored. Failure to do that is guaranteed disaster.

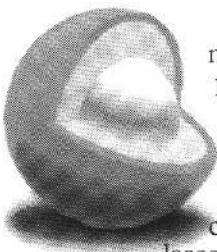
That got me to thinking what a golf course run by the players—these players—would look like. I distinguish them from the thoughtful players who serve on the green committee and the board of directors and who get involved in problem solving at the

club. Nor does this reference those rational, thinking individuals who thank you for "doing what has to be done." I am talking about the complainers who occupy the highest seats in the peanut gallery and criticize nearly everything that goes on while they are "enjoying" a round of golf. Maybe they actually enjoy the complaining more than they do the game.

A golf course run by the players would always be open, assuring them they would never be inconvenienced by the weather. Since they are short term thinkers—"now" is what concerns them most—there is never a concern about ramifications of playing when it is too wet. Or frosty.

Oh, and since the course is always open, golf carts are ALWAYS running. Go ahead and throw away those
(Continued on page 7)

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(Continued from page 5)

NO CARTS signs. You won't need them on a course run by the players.

Another thing you won't need on a golf course run by the players is one inch hose and syringe nozzles. They don't like the aggravation and think it is a waste of labor to have someone doing something of such low technology.

These folks will greatly influence the machinery found in the golf course shop. For example, you will never see an aerifier there—not a GA-60, no Toro Greens Aerators, no Ryan Greensaires. Few things irritate these players more than aerifying. They loathe the greens for a week after aerification, and they curse the soil from fairway coring. Seldom will you get a "it has to be done" from them. Instead, it is a disgusted "why do they have to make such a mess on our golf course all the time?"

The subject of aerification brings up the issue of topdressing. You'd never see a course run by the players disrupted by topdressing. After all, this is another one of those practices that bugs the daylights out of them, one they see too often and one they'd cancel in the stroke of a true putt on a smooth, fast green.

These players would have their greens cut short, short, short, too. And with no regard for the weather, green contours, plant health, stress or anything else.

Since there is more controversy these days about sand bunkers, it would be an easy decision to fill in all bunkers on the course run by the players. No sand—no problems.

You have to wonder about pin placements on a course run by the players and how they would be handled. If I were to guess, my money would go on a "center of the green" placement for all eighteen. Not much to complain about with a flag flying from there.

A common complaint from players of this sort is that the staff is always in the way. How would a course run by the players manage this dilemma? I theorize they would have a crew of 50 report at daylight, work for three hours and go home for the rest of the day. I wish them good luck in finding 50 kids in Madison who'd work circumstances like those!

It would be fun to visit a golf course run by the players. I would expect to see ice water on every hole by 7:00 a.m. every day. Housekeeping would likely take precedence over turf man-

agement. The impulse some of them have to "nuke" every pest problem would have to be dealt with. The budget would be halved, since we spend too much now. Somehow all programs would be executed so no one was inconvenienced in any way whatsoever. Nobody wants their ox gored!

I am kidding in all of this, of course. The vast majority of the golf players I deal with agree with my theorem "you cannot expect excellence through neglect." Aerification is aggravating, but necessary. So is topdressing.

They know handwatering and a dozen or two other similar time consuming chores are essential. Some even do thank us for doing these unexciting jobs. Maybe the unreasonable attitude of a tiny minority is exacerbated in a tough year like 1995.

The good news is we have all winter to put golf course issues back into perspective and to chuckle at some of the silliness we hear day to day. Then, in four short months, it starts all over again.

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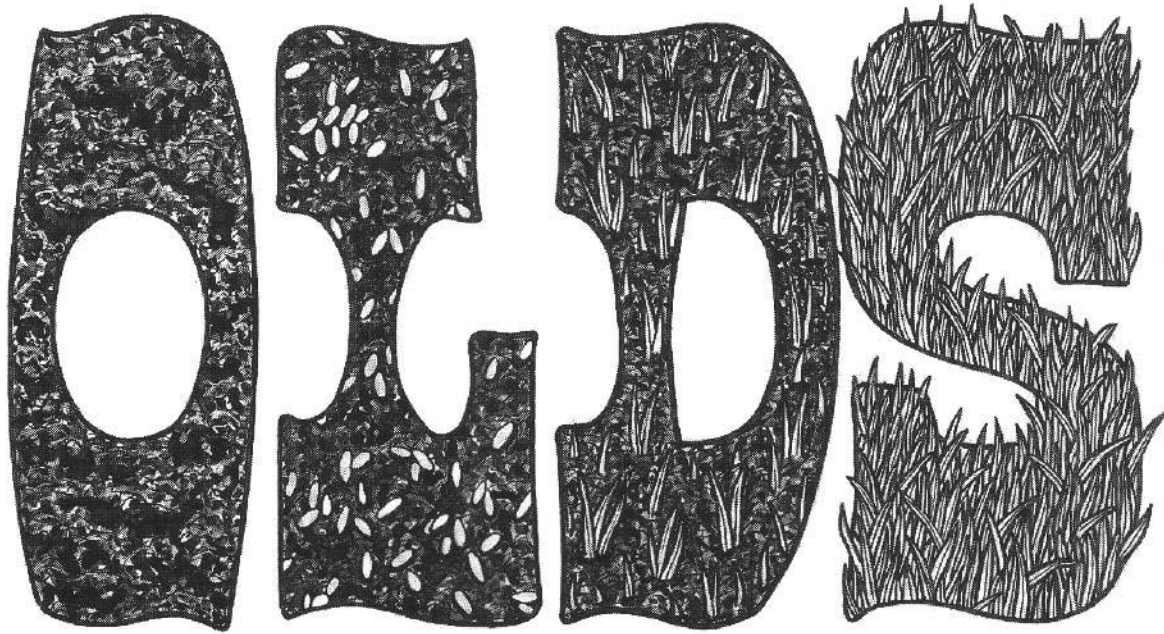
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I Quit Wearing My Boots Today

By Tony Rzadzki
Bristlecone Pines Golf Course

Editor's Note: Not only is Tony Rzadzki building a new golf course as a new resident of Wisconsin, he's also a new member of the WGCSA and a new, regular contributor to THE GRASS ROOTS. Give him a warm welcome!

There is something about all of us. There is, whether you choose to believe it or not, a spiritual aura that surrounds each of us. I truly believe this and can honestly state as fact that things have happened to me this year that will justify my statements. And today something that had been reoccurring for the last month happened again! IT RAINED! I don't want you to get the impression that I am some kind of spiritualist, but an innate feeling toward nature has overcome me this year. I have been humbled once again.

I left Illinois to come to 'God's Country'. I came to build and maintain a top notch golf course in 'Lake Country', a beautiful part of Wisconsin that I and my family truly enjoy. I really looked forward to my new position, and I was anxious to see new land forms unfold. To my dismay, Mother Nature has thwarted my every effort. I think I spent the whole month of May slogging around in mud and drafting ideas for my maintenance facility about a hundred times.

June and July. How can you beat weather like this for growing in a golf course. What a gravy train couple of months for golf course construction. I never saw so much dust in my life. A tank truck loaded with water soaked down the haul roads 12 hours a day. Within minutes of his passing the dust was flying again.

Some time in that two month span our architect, Scott Miller, paid us his bimonthly visit. He usually spends two and a half days, making changes, staking trees, and flagging grass lines for seeding. Scott Miller is from Arizona. But when 106 degree tem-

perature hits and the THI is 120, Mother Nature can bring the heartiest soul to his knees. I was crawling.

I was rolling right along and had four holes seeded and under my care by August 5th. Though I started getting edgy that week and a sneaky suspicion began to grow about me and inside my stomach. I remember talking to a couple of the construction workers about this date eight years ago when I was growing in Cantigny Golf back in Illinois. I should have kept my mouth shut. On August 9th, four and a half inches of rain devastated our golf course. Almost to the date, eight years ago Cantigny was deluged with fourteen inches of rain in one day! Call it a coincidence, call it dejavue. That native spirit was howling around that day, just as she was eight years ago.

One of the owners, the project manager and I spent the afternoon dodging lightning bolts, flash floods, and assessing the damage as it ran out under our feet. But something else happened that day that has been happening less than weekly ever since. I started to take notice of this and thought that maybe I could try to fight this nemesis on her terms. Hmmm.

We all know of course that once the soil gets as super saturated as it is that the weather pattern can only get worse. And it did. God's Country became Mother Nature's sauna. As August temperatures reached the upper 80's to low 90's thunderheads grew and so did the rainfall. Every time Wadsworth, the construction company, would rework and complete a hole, at least .90 inches of rain would devastate it with washouts. A part from that, on August 18th our 'Parade of Homes' was to begin and the roads needed to be spotless. After spending two days and nights shoveling, sweeping, and

fire hosing the mud off of the street for our pre-opening of the homes on Friday night; Mother Nature dumped another two and a half inches on us the following morning.

Since that time, the weather pattern has persisted, so has the disease populations, especially pythium. I consider myself fortunate in one respect. Yes, I now have gorges running through all of my fairways and wiers constructed to withstand a hundred year rain event completely destroyed, but I have no *Poa annua* loss problems as many of you do. I guess in that respect we are all even...we're all suffering.

Wadsworth has been running like a freight train on a straightaway. We've decided to continue construction and make repairs later. They have successfully seeded two and a half holes since the last rain and hope to complete three holes a week for the remainder of the month.

Last night the weather forecast called for cooler temperatures and a cold front to pass through bringing some rain. This morning, September 7th, I woke up to a much cooler atmosphere, much like Wisconsin should be in the fall. Great I thought, my favorite boots are dry and I'll slip them on and go to work. We only got .15 inches and it was slightly drizzling. By mid morning my boots had gotten totally saturated...again, with an additional .40 inch down pour.

I do believe that there is a spirit within and about all of us. Call me superstitious if you will, every old baseball player that I know is, but the one thing that I had noticed about a month before has happened again! Every time that I have worn my boots this season it has rained. My spirit is now telling me to take off those !@\$#am boots, but keep that lucky buckeye in your pocket! ♣



It Was A Tough Year For Golf Course Superintendents

By Monroe S. Miller

I received a short note from a colleague—you all know him—in mid-September that could have been written by any of us. It went like this

Monroe -
The course is rebounding nicely, and so am I.

Regards,

XXXXXXXX

He had me a little worried during the summer. Things weren't going that well for anyone, including him, only he wasn't used to it. But he found himself and his inner resolve in late August and the turnaround his words reflect shows how important that attribute can be.

As tough as it was, this was a summer that took a lot of resolve, an upbeat attitude and some faith that the worst weather would eventually end.

It was the hottest June/July/August period—meteorological summer—on record. You'll be telling your kids and grandkids and your young summer employees about 1995 for years and years to come. In our town, the hottest summer meant a three month temperature average (based on the daily high-low readings) that was 74.6, easily best the previous mark of 74.0 degrees, set in 1901. Record keeping started in 1869. A "normal" summer sees a temperature average of 68.6 degrees.

For golf course superintendents, the temperatures were only part of the misery. The oppressive, almost overwhelming humidity meant there were plant diseases in full bloom somewhere on the course almost continually. The humidity made the 90-100 degrees feel 20 degrees warmer.

We had 27 days with a temperature above 90 degrees, broke three

daily high records (6/23, 8/12 and 8/13) and one highest low ever recorded on 7/14!

Rainfall was spotty, not only around the state but from one side of town to the other. I was crying for rainfall while other superintendents in the city were cursing the excess. It seemed the southeast part of the state received the worst of the torrential downpours.

Of course, the brutal summer followed a cold, wet spring and, by the third week of September, wet weather brought a temporary halt of the aerifying and overseeding going on all over Wisconsin. In fact, some parts of northwest Wisconsin had snow on September 21st! How much do you love this Wisconsin weather?

So we are back at it, a favorite Wisconsin past time, particularly among people like farmers and golf course superintendents—whining about the weather. In May—will we ever have summer? In July—too dry. In August—too hot and too humid. In September—too wet and cold. Two months after that—too much (or too little) snow. And no one to blame!

The soil moisture conditions reports are here for your edification.

Regardless of your position on the issue, on August 21 the office of Public Intervenor was closed. A report in the *Wisconsin State Journal* said Tom Dawson, an occasional speaker on the WGCSA podium, and Kathleen Falk closed the office and took vacation before assuming their new jobs as assistant attorneys general in the Justice Department.

The PI office was downsized in Governor Thompson's budget and moved into the DNR effective September 1st. It is now an answering machine. The message says, in part, that the office was "abolished as part

