

was headed home in a few days, so it could also have been that I didn't want to tell them face to face.

Two weeks of leave went quickly. As with most GIs headed to a war zone, I was sure, absolutely positive certain, that I'd be coming home in a black body bag. So as I saw family members, I was fearful it was for the last time. I stopped to see Jim Love in his campus office, drove to Nakoma to say farewell to Jerry O'Donnell, and went to my college fraternity house to see that group for the last time.

In my adult life, I've cried only a couple of times. The night Cheryl took me to the airport was one of them; of course I thought that would be my last moments with her. The sadness I felt was overwhelming.

The trip to Asia started in California - Oakland, to be exact. We were outfitted, given more shots, and herded onto aircraft that was so overloaded that the 707 (no kitchen, one bathroom) hardly got off the ground. On to Alaska, landing for fuel, and from there to Japan. Another fueling took place before we left on the final leg to Tan Son Nhut airport near Saigon.

The first impression I had - from the air - was the unbelievable green. From the triple canopy jungle in the more north areas of South Vietnam to the rice paddies of the Mekong Delta, plant life abounds. The view from the air is amplified, too, once you are on the ground.

And why wouldn't it be green. The DMZ, way north of the Saigon area where I was to be stationed, is at the 17th parallel. We were at about the 10th parallel, well below the Tropic of Cancer. The climate made you feel you could almost throw a softball or hit a golf ball to the equator.

It was funny, flying into that war zone where nearly 500,000 GIs and their equipment and material were carrying on a war, because it looked so peaceful and serene and beautiful. I was almost swept with relief.

Until we landed. Officers pushed us hard to deplane and get aboard Army buses that would take us to a replacement battalion where our final assignment would be made. There was constant fear of mortar and RPG attacks on the big planes shuffling Joe in and out of Nam. There was a lot of swearing and confusion, made worse by the high and debilitating humidity and heat. Late July, when I arrived, as my luck would have it, is at the peak of the summer monsoon. That part of the world gets about 100" of rain a year, much of it during the summer monsoon season. Heat, humidity and heavy rain define the summer. Heat and humidity define the winter monsoon time from November to March.

Golf course superintendents can relate to my crude rain gauge that first August; it rained so hard and so often I didn't want to risk exaggeration, so I would set a jar outside our hooch (tent-like living quarters) and measure the precip each day with a foot ruler. I would measure and empty every day and recorded over 20 inches of rain in those 31 days of August 1969 at Long Binh. As an aside, we experienced over 60 consecutive days of 100 degree heat.

Everybody was especially jumpy

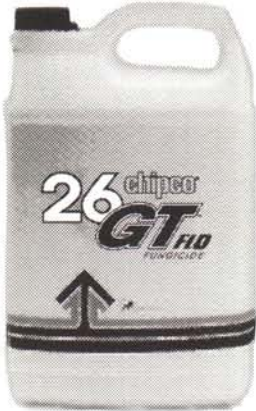
when I got in-country. The Tet Offensive had caught the US and the ARVN forces by surprise and the VC and NVA had killed a lot of men on our side. New guys like me were scared anyway, and the nervousness of the veterans impacted us heavily.

I recall the screaming and hollering of the FNGs ("funny" new guys, as we were all called upon arrival) about our lack of weapons. War zone, Tet, Cobra and Huey gunships in the sky, tanks and APCs and V-100s absolutely everywhere on the ground, and we couldn't get an M-16 to protect ourselves from Charlie. "You'll get a rifle when you get to your unit," we were told.

Small comfort. That night - my first night in RVN - Viet Cong sappers penetrated the perimeter of the Bien Hoa AFB and hit the fuel depot. The base was adjacent to the replacement battalion. The explosion was huge and loud and lit up the night sky. We were frightened to death and . . . no weapons!

In time I received an assignment to an MP unit right near there at Long Binh, and to this day I am thankful I made it home from the worst experience I could ever have. I lived through it without a scratch, and sadly there are over 50,000 GIs

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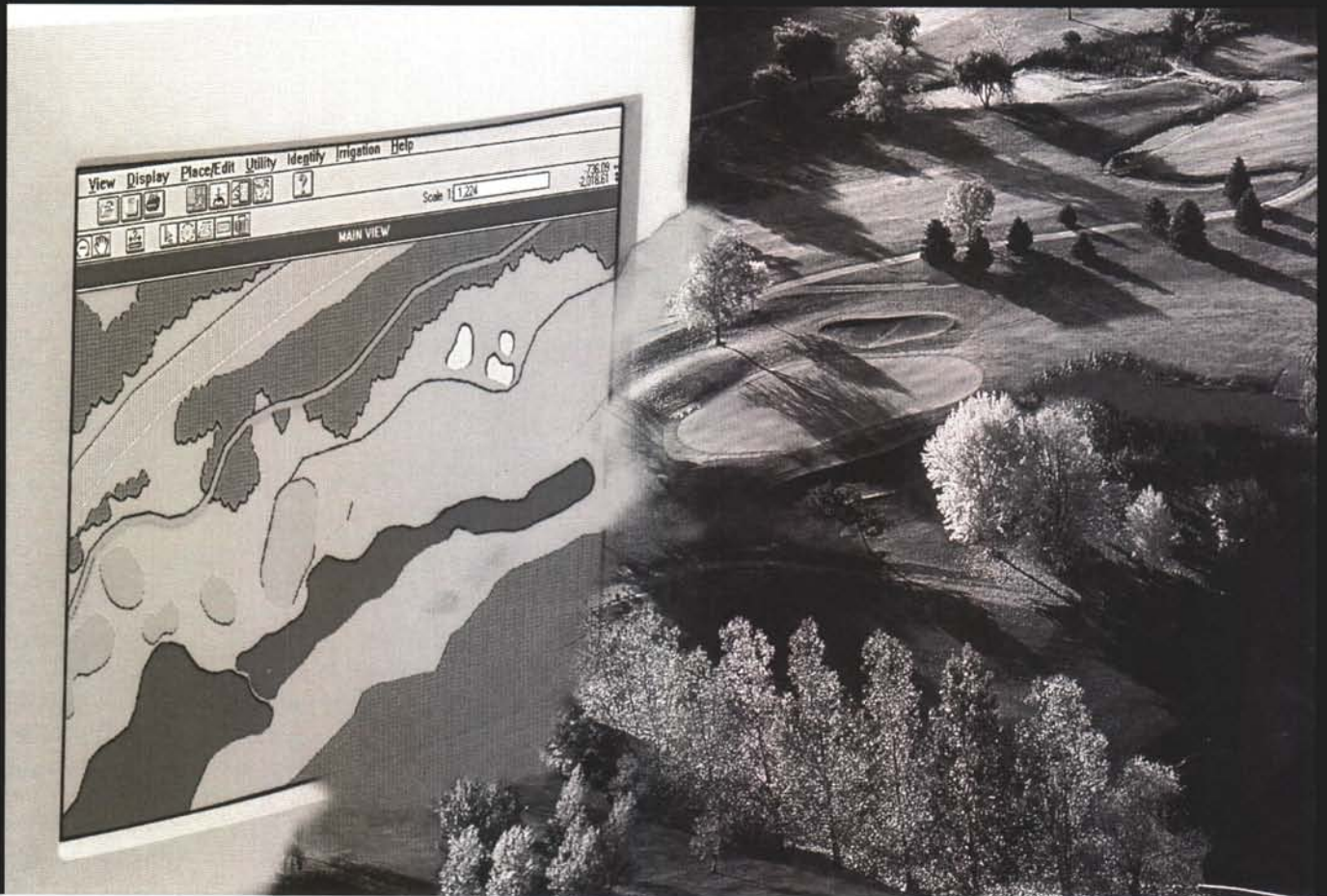


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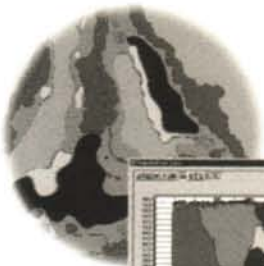
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who did not. Hundreds of thousands of others lived but still today carry physical and mental injuries. The whole experience seems like it happened yesterday, yet it was thirty years ago today.

As events of late have reminded me of that time in my life, I have

been thinking about the experience a lot. It certainly is not an obsession, like it has been for some Vee-yet Naam (as LBJ used to say) vets. Actually, as I've led my life for 30 years since, I haven't thought about that place and those times more than infrequently. I wasn't, at 22

years of age, wise or sophisticated enough to wonder whether war was right or wrong. The US was engaged in it, I believed in our country, and raising my right hand to take the oath was an easy choice. Really, it was the only choice I could have made. I will always wonder why Clinton couldn't muster the minimal courage to do the same. His failure to do so will be his legacy (along with a thousand other immoral, unethical, dishonest and probably illegal acts).

It is easy for me to say that it was the worst time of my life, because it was. But it has also been a powerful influence on me for the last three decades. I think military service is good for anybody. The lessons of discipline and order, cleanliness and neatness, respect for others, camaraderie and a hundred things are often an edge I have that works in my favor.

That time away deepened my relationship with Cheryl. It is almost a relief always knowing your worst time is behind you.

Army service and the 15 months spent in Asia give me a reference point that keeps life and its problems in perspective. Hot days on our course, when considered in that context, are pretty minimal. Any weather event is.

Irrigation problems in the middle of the night, tough situations with players, diseases, and any of the other innumerable troubles we face, pale in contrast to running the risk of losing life in a war zone. Long days, a hundred consecutive of them on the golf course, are pretty tolerable compared to 12 hours on/12 hours off, seven days a week, months and months on end in war.

Although it was not what I could call a life defining experience for me as it was for some, I think I am a better man for it. Also easy to say for a survivor.

And I would guess that for as long as I live I will always say, "it seems like it was only yesterday." 🌿

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# Green Wisconsin

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

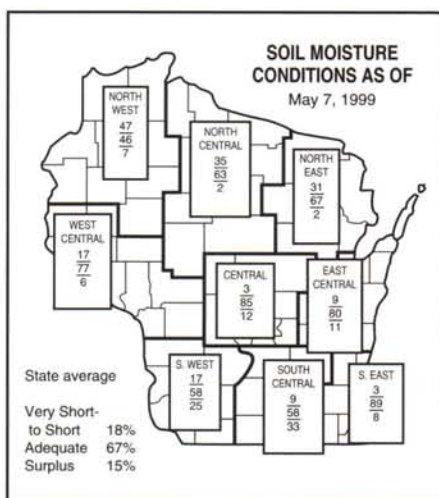
I'm pretty sure Antonio Vivaldi never visited Wisconsin, but he must have dreamed of a place like our state when he composed the beautiful Four Seasons Concerto. His allegro from "Spring" and the "Summer" adagio of that concerto capture the essence of the rich, green and fruitful spring we have had in southern Wisconsin. I have spent nearly all of my life in this part of Wisconsin, and I cannot recall ever seeing vegetation this green. Some days the green was so bright that eye protection was almost a necessity! That was especially true of turfgrasses.

If we did have anything to complain about (and we do not), it would be the long hours needed to keep golf courses cut and near some level of playability. We were at war for a month or so, and our course was the battlefield. It was a problem I would love to have every spring and early summer.

Trees are prospering, too. There is a huge crops of leaves on the deciduous trees, and the new growth candles of the evergreens was impressive. We are going to have jungle lined fairways this summer! It all has been a reminder of what ample rainfall can do for plant growth. It taxes the memory and imagination to think we have such cold winter months,

when nothing grows. Remember, however, it will take only a month of powder dry weather to bring back reality.

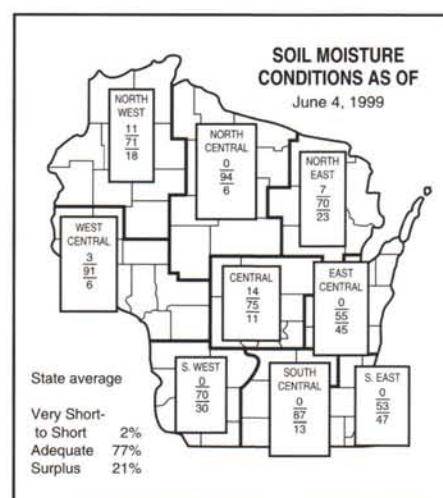
Statistics from the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service are here for you.



Speaking of a labor shortage in the spring, there is a bill in the Wisconsin legislature that would require all of the state's 426 school districts to start the fall semester after September 1st. It was sponsored by lawmakers from tourist areas, and the bill is gaining momentum.

The state's school districts

almost unanimously oppose the bill, as do most school groups. The bill's promoters - tourism and restaurant industries - carry a big stick. Tourism is one of the state's top three industries with 200,000 full-time jobs and a tax bill that



brings state government over \$1 billion. They are tired of getting clobbered by the loss of their young workers in August when school starts and they are still extremely busy.

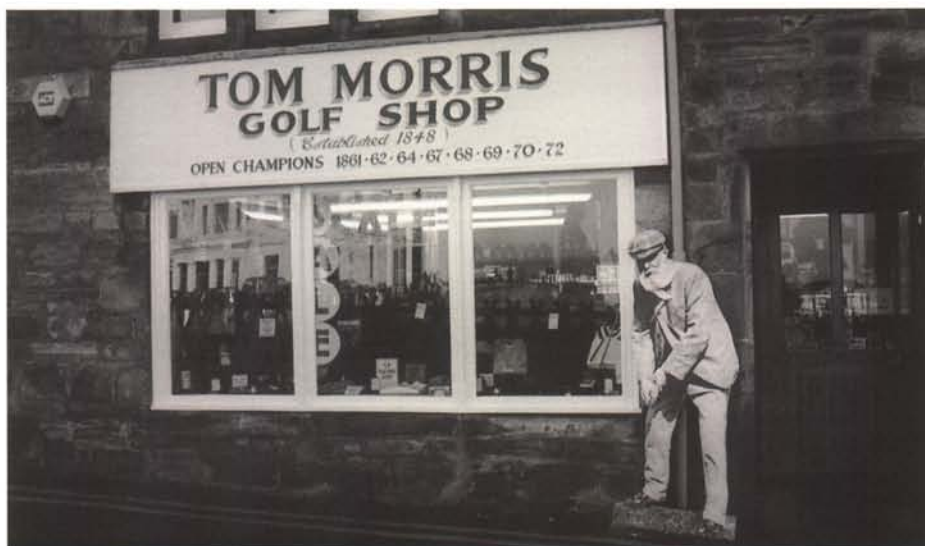
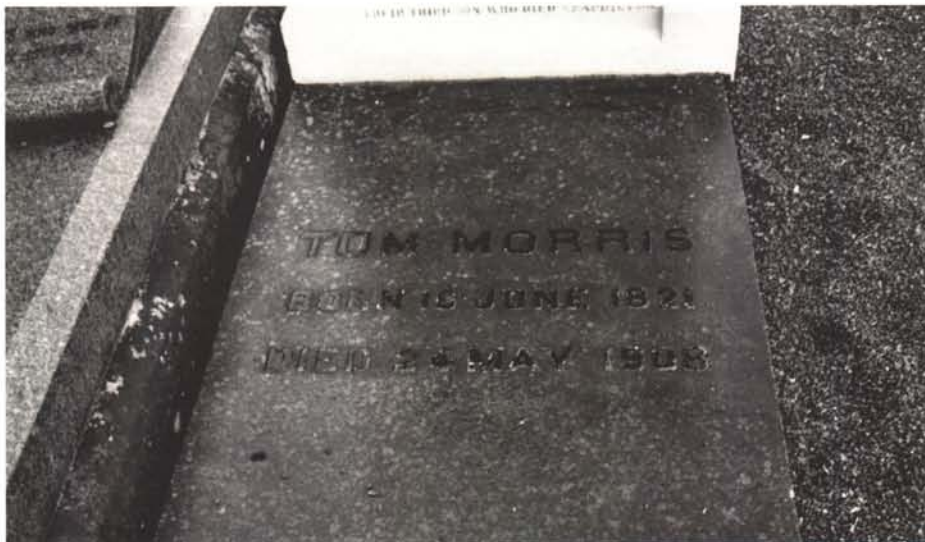
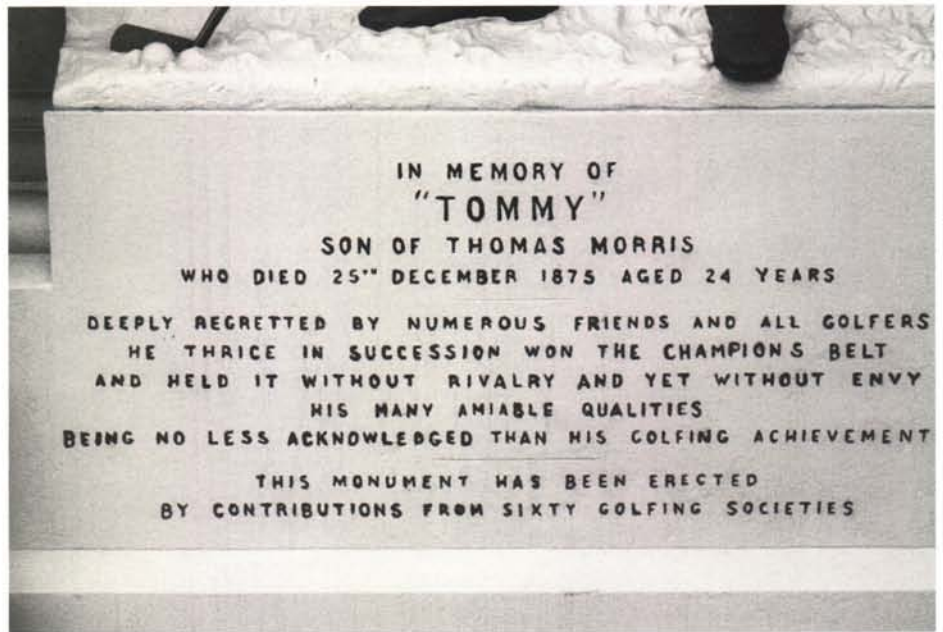
How do you stand on this issue? We could be affected by the outcome.

Last January, Derek Van Damme visited St. Andrews, Scotland. He took some photos that show the grave of Old Tom Morris and his son Tommy. Both were great golfers of their time, and of course we trace our profession back to that one individual, Old Tom Morris. Van Damme also visited, as so many have, the Old Tom Morris Golf Shop at the St. Andrews golf course. The pics are here for your enjoyment.

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Congratulations to Tony Rządski. Back in early spring, he was notified by Audubon International that his property was the first in Wisconsin and the 44th in the world to meet certification requirements of their backyard program.

He's been consistent; everywhere he goes he practices the principles of commitment to protecting water quality, enhancing wildlife habitat and resource conservation. What an excellent example for all of us to follow.

Herb Kohler, president and chairman of the board at Kohler Co., has accepted an appointment to the GCSAA Foundation board of trustees. He joined Tom Fazio as new members of the board. Thanks and congratulations.

We are going to continue to get caught up with our thanks to those who make this journal possible. This issue, appreciation is extended to the gals on our staff who are dedicated to golf turf in Wisconsin. They are Alice Chalmers, Paige Turner, Eileen Forward and Amanda Reckinwith. I extend to you, along with them, best wishes for a great July and August in this last golf season of the century. 🌿

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# No-Way Ray... *Poa annua* Control

USGA

By Bob Vavrek, USGA Agronomist, North Central Region

Growing conditions have been everything but consistent across the North Central Region this spring. Cool wet conditions continue to persist well into June in the Dakotas and Montana. In contrast, the cool spring weather suddenly changed to extended periods of hot, humid, droughty weather across Michigan and Wisconsin just after Memorial Day. Roughs are burning up and greens are wilting in Detroit and Milwaukee, while I have been scraping frost from car windows and wearing layers of fleece, gloves, and raingear during TAS visits in Montana.

Winterkill always affects golf turf somewhere in the Region each year. This spring a number of courses in the Detroit area entered the season with considerable injury to *Poa annua* on greens. More severe and more widespread winterkill occurred across Montana and Eastern North Dakota.

Many superintendents believe the most severe injury occurred around December. Unusually warm weather during fall extended the golf season into late November and early December on many courses. The turf never seemed to have the opportunity to harden-off before the first frigid blast of weather hit the open golf courses in late December. It was very easy to determine the exact percentage of *Poa annua* that existed in greens last year by calculating the ratio of brown to green turf this spring.

Cool cloudy weather certainly didn't help the rate of turf recovery during April and May, even at courses where superintendent managed to convince golfers to play temporary greens. Experienced superintendents generally agree that playing a severely thinned-out green will significantly prolong the recovery period. I try my best to convince golfers that playing an overseeded green will just about guarantee an agonizingly slow recovery, but my plea for sanity typically falls on deaf ears.

Most courses, however, entered the season in excellent condition. Some superintendents say the quality of turf during April, particularly putting surfaces, has never been better during the past 20 years, or so. On the down side, other superintendents have noticed more *Poa annua* in greens this spring, perhaps due to the mild winter. No winter stress means that nearly all the *Poa* that germinated in the putting surface last fall developed into dime to quarter sized colonies. The common complaint from golfers this spring: bumpy greens, a concern not limited to the

North Central Region according to the other USGA Agronomists in the Northeast Region.

Many greens were indeed bumpy, as they usually are in April and early May. *Poa annua*, especially the small dense colonies that germinated and developed last fall, tend to grow much faster during the spring compared to bentgrass. Perhaps the early start to the season last year and a week or so of warm April weather this year have conditioned golfers into believing that putting surfaces should peak at Memorial Day, instead of the 4th of July. In any event, I hope it doesn't take a widespread event of winterkill to reacquaint golfers with the normal time line of turf growth and development for the northern tier of states.

A surprising number of superintendents still make a serious effort to reduce or eradicate *Poa annua* from greens each season. I've seen greens religiously spiked/overseeded with G-whatever or A-whatever

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bentgrass and routinely doused with TGR until the putting surface during spring resembles a leopard's coat. More is better, if the turf is not responding to the growth regulator, then apply a higher rate. I wonder if the *Poa* can be enhanced to the point where it is more susceptible to winterkill, but, to quote Stan Zontek, "I digress." Some dabble with materials, such as Prograss, which are not labeled for greens. More than one person has considered and even a few "cutting-edge" types may have tried ultra-low rates of Roundup on greens for selective control of *Poa*.

Sometimes all these intense efforts are rewarded and they actually reduce the percentage of *Poa* in a few greens...well for a while anyway. The miracle conversion usually lasts just long enough for the superintendent to write up the program in a trade journal. The turn around may even continue for another season. Sooner or later, we experience another cool, wet fall, then a mild winter, and then...you guessed it, the *Poa annua* returns into the putting surfaces with a vengeance and you are back to square one.

*Poa annua* thrives in a green for a reason. It may be compaction, poor drainage, shade, poor air circulation, poor bentgrass management, or simply natural overseeding pressure from seed being constantly tracked onto the putting surface from the fairways

and roughs. Try to force more bentgrass to grow in a poorly drained, shaded site and even if you temporarily succeed, the quality of the turf and the playing surface will be unacceptable. You could rebuild greens, remove trees, mow at a reasonable height of cut, and become very stingy with the irrigation to improve growing conditions for bentgrass, but how would you stop *Poa annua* from being tracked onto the greens and germinating in an unrepaired ball mark? You can tip the scales in favor of bentgrass in favorable sites with sound management techniques, but if you are looking for a silver bullet to convert *Poa* to bent on that small, poorly drained green cut into a dense stand of evergreens -- forget about it!

Sometimes you just have to play the hand you're dealt, even if it means *Poa* greens. It's ironic that the same people who try every trick in the book to eliminate *Poa* are the same people who pay homage to the goddess of *Poa* each spring after a bout with winterkill. The phone rings... "Hey Bob, how long before that good ol' *Poa* fills into the thin and bare areas on my greens? I really miss those little seedheads this spring. Is there anything I can do to help it along, could I spoon feed with liquid Phosphorus, could I harvest seed from fairways, could I.....?" 🌿

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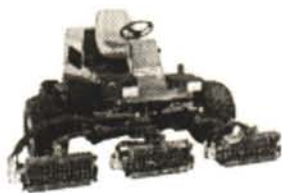
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