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ROYAL FLUSH

When Prince Charles played polo in Chicago last fall, the field had to be in prime condition for spectators and TV cameras. The field managers worked overtime to prepare the field.

by Heide Aungst, associate editor

It's a field fit for a king. Or, a future king, anyway.

When H.R.H. Prince Charles of England travelled to Chicago to play polo at the Oak Brook Polo Club, the Windy City rolled out the red carpet. Jim Mello and his crew rolled out the green field.

In March 1986, Mello, president and owner of Nice 'N Green products, took over the care for the three polo fields adjacent to the renowned Butler National Golf Club.

At one time, Butler National was a vast expanse of 14 polo fields. That was in 1922, when the Oak Brook Polo Club was founded. Today, the polo fields double as Butler National's driving ranges...a convenience for the golf course, a headache for the field managers.

But the only person worrying about that on this cool, sunny September afternoon is Steve Mello, Jim's nephew, who heads the polo field crew of four. "It needs time to heal," Steve says, shaking his head.

How can the field survive golfers' divots immediately after eight horses have torn up the turf? The spectators do all they can to help.

It's a polo ritual for fans to run onto the field at half-time—or, between chukkers, that is—to replace the divots. The thousands of polo-watchers—the men clad in silk ties and

designer suits, the women hanging on to their Princess-Di-look-alike hats, and causing their own divots with their spiked heels—run onto the field to stomp divots back into place. It's almost as much fun for the fans as sipping champagne out of silver goblets in the grandstand.

"It's really a big help to me when they replace the divots," Steve tells a

The royal ball, by all newspaper reports, was a bloody success. But no one complains about a dance floor the way they complain about a polo field.

Chicago radio reporter, who got an exclusive with the divot expert after eavesdropping on the WEED TREES & TURF interview. The entourage of media at the polo match try desperately to find interesting angles surrounding the royal visit, since Prince Charles won't grant interviews.

But the excitement of the day has to make the field abuse worth it. "It's a pain in the neck, seriously," Jim says. "It's just a lot of work, a lot of expectation and pressure. I'll be happy when it's over. It is kind of exciting, though."

Most of the excitement for Mello came the night before the match when he and his wife Sheila attended the Polo Ball on the top floor of Marshall Field's department store. Sheila, a professional dancer danced with the Prince.

The royal ball, by all newspaper reports, was a bloody success. But, no one complains about the dance floor the way they complain about a polo field.

When the Prince and several other players fell off their horses, spectators



Prince Charles, #4, greets the crowd before the polo match. (Photo by Nancy Devon)

immediately blamed the field. "It's too wet," snarled one fan.

But Steve immediately jumped to his field's defense. "It's not the field," he says. "We watered it about one inch on Wednesday (two days before the match), and it rained about $\frac{2}{10}$ of an inch that night."

The crew had to work extra to get the field in top shape for television viewers.

They usually water two or three days before a tournament, using a water wench, traveling sprinkler, which throws out 700 gallons a minute. The system completely waters the field, 300 yards long by 150 yards wide (more than nine football fields), by passing over it twice.

The amount of moisture on the field significantly affects play. "If the



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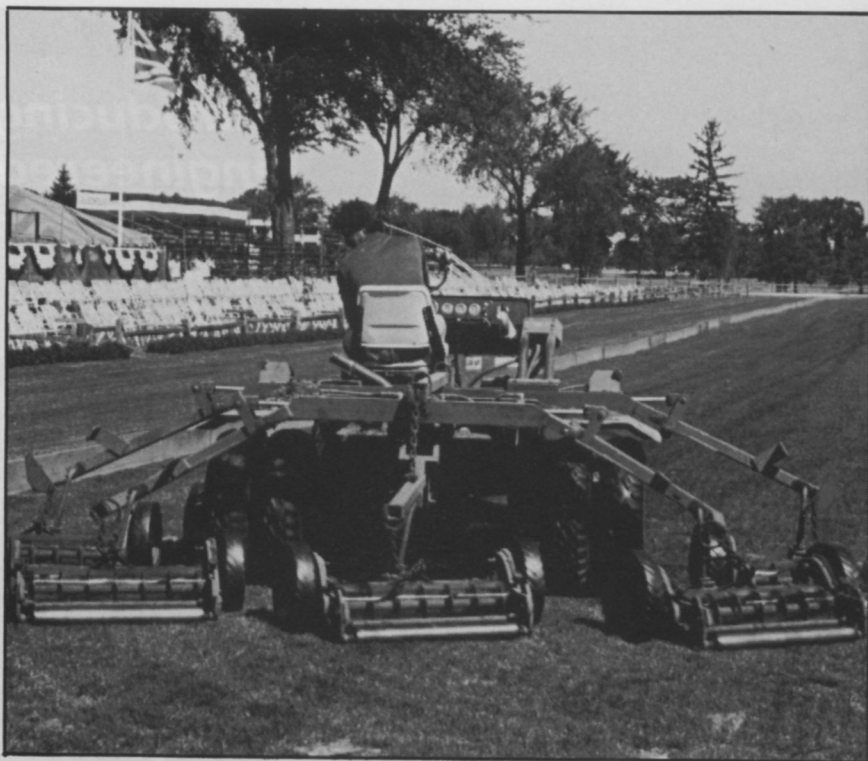
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field is too hard or dry it's tough on the horses. A horse can't get its footing and slides over the turf," Jim explains. "If it's too wet, the horse digs in and it tears up the field worse."

The divots and the height of cut also affect the ball roll. Steve double-cuts the field at a height of 1 1/2 inches on the day of a match. The double-cutting increases the speed of the ball.

The crew usually mows the field three times a week, using a Toro Parkmaster, at 1 1/2 inches during the season. They raise the height to 2 1/2 inches after the season is over to let the turf recuperate.

The bluegrass on the field is a mix-



(Above) Steve Mello double-cuts the field on the day of a match.



(Left) Jim Mello, owner of Nice 'N Green, overlooks the polo field before the big match.

ture of Ram I, Touchdown, Adelphi, Cheri, and Glade. The dirt and seed mixture used to fill in divots is a 50/50 blend of Manhattan II and All*Star ryegrass, which germinates quickly.

Jim says he would like to re-seed the field using turf-type tall fescues which require less water than bluegrass.

Turf is fertilized with Nice 'N Green's liquid iron four times a year and a dry application in early winter. The crew aerifies in spring and fall.

"The horses are my best weed control," Jim says. His biggest weed problem is knotweed, which grows in wet areas with poor drainage. The crew usually spot-treats the problem, but waits until the season ends to treat it full force.

At the end of the season the field is renovated through slit-seeding, top dressing, and dragging. That's all repeated again in the spring.

"I could take care of Comiskey Park, no problem," Steve says. "After this it would be a piece of cake."

Getting the field ready for the royal visit and television cameras which zero-in on the field was a lot of work for Jim, Steve and the crew, but it was a lot of satisfaction. "This is my big day," says Steve. "I feel like I'm the fifth member of the team."

And that team was a winner. The U.S. beat England, 12-10. **WT&T**

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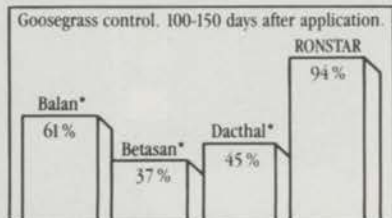


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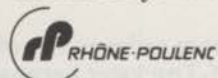


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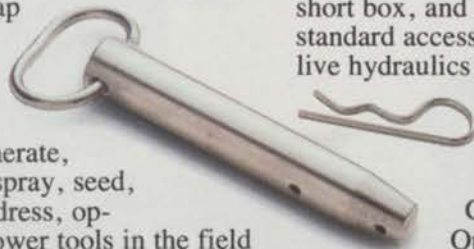
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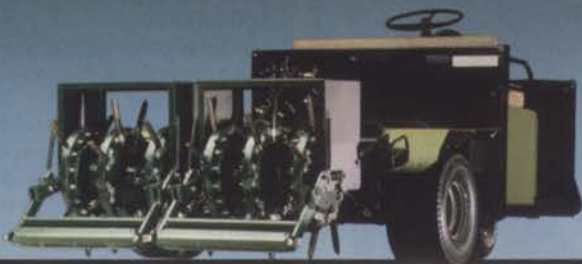
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GOVERNMENT GLOOM

Working within the framework of a bureaucracy can give government workers the blues. Here are what some must cope with en route to doing their jobs as effectively as possible.

by Jeff Sobul, assistant editor

It's not just having limited funds that makes it frustrating. It's that, when working in a bureaucracy, managers have to go through so much trouble to get their money.

While bureaucracies exist in the private sector as well, the vast majority occur in the public sector. From the tiniest municipality to the largest state, government landscape managers often must deal with miles of red tape to get funds. Getting additional funds above and beyond the budget is even more difficult.

Buddy, can you spare a dime?

For some, like Kenneth Grothous, superintendent of parks in tiny Delphos, Ohio (pop. 7300), getting the same budget allocation as in 1986 would be nice. Unfortunately for Grothous, \$40,000 of his \$140,000 1986 budget came from federal revenue sharing, all of which he has lost this year. In addition, his \$100,000 operating budget has been cut another \$10,000. With most of the operating budget paying six to eight maintenance workers on staff from April through November, little is left to get necessary work done.

Grothous divides the rest among maintenance of the city football stadium

in which two high school teams play, baseball diamonds, and the town swimming pool. The pool is the city's main source of income, and thus the high-

quate to maintain the city's 128 acres. The land includes a sports complex, a

BMX racing track and five neighborhood parks (mostly picnic areas) for the town of about 15,000.

However, his small budget limits plantings. Given more funding, he adds, "I'd do a lot more landscaping."

For purchases between \$500 and \$1,500, Arledge must get three estimates before one is approved by the city. For projects above \$1,500, he is required by law to advertise for two weeks to get bids. Though Arledge wishes the process were faster, he believes that it's still good policy because it makes spending more accountable.

Arledge's biggest problem, however, may come from the possible loss of diazinon. It has been his most cost-effective way of dealing with armyworms and fire ants, a common and dangerous problem in the South. If the situation continues, he will have to find an alternative—which will in all likelihood be more expensive.

Similar problems exist on a larger scale in other cities. Mark Gillespie, who manages public land in one of Charlotte, N.C.'s four park districts, would love to add more people to his staff, "but it's difficult to make a case for additional personnel when facilities are added," he says. "You have to make a well-documented case in order to get more people."

His district is staffed by 25 full-timers, with 10 people added during the busy season, although there's no real slow-down of work during the year because of back-up. Gillespie would like to add one more five-person crew and three temporary people. Without this help, he says, during the summer his district just tries to stay even with the work. "Wintertime is the time to make advancements. In winter, my priorities shift to improv-

est priority.

Grothous plans to add a water slide to the pool in hopes of boosting revenues.

"(The town) needs to take more steps to increase revenues, such as a special operating fund for projects on existing facilities," he observes. However, he expects revenue sharing to return—in some form—after 1987 because of pressure from municipalities.

Carrol Arledge of the Clinton, Miss. parks and recreation division has the help of a two-mill tax levy. He feels his seven-person staff is ade-



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ing."

As with Grothous, Gillespie makes a priority list for his two-year budget (which comes in one-year increments). "You have to concentrate on areas in the public eye," he says. His main priority is Memorial Stadium, which hosts the Shrine Bowl college football all-star game each December. Other priorities include preparing for various festivals and maintenance of the grounds of Discovery Place, a nature and science museum.

"It's a constant juggling of resources," Gillespie says. "You let areas go that don't get as much attention. But that catches up with you." To help with the juggling, the parks department recently hired a budget analyst.

He has had to stretch out his mowing schedule in order to cut costs some. His department is also using plant growth regulators on rights-of-way.

Most of the work his department does is horticulture-related, including landscaping and tree work (take-downs, pruning, planting, etc.). As a result, Gillespie spends a lot of money on pesticides, but he again runs into red tape because of hiring constraints.

"We need people with pesticide

applicator certification," he says. "The personnel department doesn't realize this." Despite this, he adds, "We're really conscious of pesticide safety." His people always have up-to-date safety information.

Slip slidin' away

Transportation department personnel nationwide, struggling with nature to

Research shows that growth regulators can save states between 30 and 50 percent on mowing costs.

keep rights-of-way clean and safe for motorists, railroads and public utility companies, also operate within bureaucracies.

And with budget limitations imposed by state legislators, transportation department employees must make due with what they have, also establishing a priority list to allocate money where it is most beneficial and necessary.

Though priorities often differ from region to region across the country, some seem to be cropping up as often as weeds along a highway. A major concern for most transportation departments is erosion control, both during and after rights-of-way construction.

Boyd Cassell of the Virginia Highway Department says every construction project undertaken in the state includes erosion control measures. Considerations for control during and after a job are worked into the project budget, he adds.

Cassell's control methods during construction include silt barriers, geotextile use and fences for slope protection. The key to post-construction control, he says, is re-establishing vegetation as quickly as possible. This includes sodding and planting shrubs and trees.

Bill Johnson of the North Carolina Department of Landscape Engineering uses similar methods. "We are required by law to re-establish vegetation, using grass, seed, shrubs and the like," he says. In addition to geotextiles, he also incorporates fiberglass drainage ditches into the construction project. His office is involved throughout the life of each project.

Limiting growth

Once vegetation has been re-established, controlling its growth becomes a major concern. States in the temperate Southeast, where a full growing season translates into frequent mowing, have been using growth regulators with increasing frequency.

Jeff Doan of Technomic, a market research company, has done \$750,000 in research on the rights-of-way pesticide market. He says that nearly all of the states from North Carolina and Tennessee south, and from Louisiana east, are using PGRs.

"PGRs are economical if they work," Doan comments. His research shows that growth regulators can save states between 30 and 50 percent on mowing costs.

Virginia's Cassell has also used PGRs successfully on a limited basis. "We use it around guardrails and other narrow areas," he says.

Whatever the extent of use PGRs are getting in the Southeast, their economic benefits suggest that while they may keep grass from growing, their use in vegetation control will continue to grow. And in a situation where every penny counts, and is accounted for, a cost-reducing agent is always welcome. **WT&T**



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