



Within the Leather

by David Kazmierczak CGCS

Man, it was hot. Like, Africa hot on the 4th of July 2012. I went in to the course and

turned on a few irrigation heads first thing in the morning, and made the usual tour of the course. Everybody showed up, and on time, and the crew was getting sent home after the morning jobs because of the holiday, and because of the heat. Not that that was particularly different from any other 4th of July day at Prestwick, but this day was a little more special.

This 4th of July, after leaving the course, I loaded up the family and a cooler or two and headed north. We had been invited up to friend's cabin for the rest of the day and I planned to take the following day off as well. It would be a rare moment of quality family time away from the golf course in the dead middle of summer.

Secure in the knowledge everything was alright at the course, I left it to my capable assistants and off we went. What a day it was. There is not much anybody wants to do in 102 degree, 70-plus percent humidity day unless it involves a pontoon boat, a couple jet skis and a large body of water. That is precisely what we had. My friend's cabin is in Wahkon, on the south shore of Lake Mil Lacs right next to Izatys Resort. The lake was fairly calm for its' standard, and we had an absolute blast tubing, swimming and riding the jet skis. My daughter, who is wheel-chair bound, even got to go out on a slow tube ride with the help of my son and myself and it will probably be the highlight of her summer.

By mid-evening we pulled in the dock and headed for Izatys where we booked a room. We cleaned up

quickly, and raced back to the cabin for dinner and an evening filled with cheer, revelry and fireworks. This was my first trip to Izatys, and I naturally noticed the golf course as it pretty much surrounds the entire complex. I had heard the stories about its' history as an upper-tier golf facility that had fallen on harder times after a few ownership changes and a bank foreclosure. Things looked nice and green and since I was not going to play on this family trip, I just kind of tried to keep golf course off my mind.

As hot as it was when we left my friend's cabin, by the time we got back a north wind had developed from somewhere and the evening was really pleasant. In the distance we could hear a few rumbles and I of course went straight to the phone to check radar. Sure enough, a large thunderstorm was passing just north of us but would not interrupt the evening. By the time the town of Wahkon was sending their aerial show up for us to the east, Mother Nature was conjuring up her own little treat to the west of us. We decided to leave right away after fireworks and get our family to the hotel room before it was too late. We got to Izatys, and to our room as lightning lit up the entire western sky. It was going to be a gully-washer at best, something more at worst.

I think everybody in the state has had at least one or two of these nasty storms hit their area, with differing degrees of destruction. The Mil Lacs region was no different, and especially this night. The storm took out power at Izatys for a while, and for at least a half an hour, we had to listen to a fire buzzer go off in the room next door because of it. The storm passed finally and we all got a little sleep after a long but fun day.

The next morning we got up and I packed up what I could in the van. The first tee and practice facility was right next to the parking lot. The bunkers were completely full of water and there were branches here and there, but it did

not deter a nice line of golfers from waiting their turn at the first tee. My wife and daughter were taking their usual amount of time getting ready so I decided to walk down between the pool/volleyball area that was flooded and the practice green to look at the lake. Mil Lacs was like an angry sea this morning, sending three-foot waves crashing upon the beach due to a very stiff north wind. Having gazed upon its' aggressive beauty for about five minutes, I walked back to the room taking me straight over the practice green.

As I got there, I noticed there was a worker pulling up on a triplex mower to mow the green. I also noticed some small branches and twigs on the green in front of me. Naturally I started policing the green for him. He made his first pass and motioned that I did not have to do that at which point I replied that I was used to it and introduced myself. The guy on the mower was Steve Schumaker, Superintendent of Izaty's Resort.

I had never met Steve before, but we did have some common acquaintances as it turned out, and he relayed to me the story of how he was the superintendent when the courses were built, and what he was dealing with now just to keep the course running on a bare-bones budget. It was a nice conversation until it was interrupted by my wife. She said she was stuck on the second floor with my daughter as the elevator had stopped running due to the storm. When Steve heard this he instantly ran over to the pool area, talked to one guy who told him the guy he was looking for was next door. The two of them then dropped what they were doing and literally ran over to the building to help us. Ten minutes later the doors were opening and we were able to get Susan down to floor level.

As we left Izatys and headed east, back to my friend's cabin for another day of fun, a few general observations popped into my head from the morning's experience. The most obvious was

how great the guys were in helping us out. They did not just pass the buck, or slowly get to the issue. They bolted to help us, and made sure we were taken care of when they obviously had a lot of other urgent things they had to take care of. My thanks to Steve and the staff at Izatys.

The next thing I mused upon was how frustrating it must be to be Steve and any of his staff that at one time was allowed to maintain the course at the highest of levels, but now must make do and find a way to keep the place a notch below. I think everybody in the business can understand the feeling of not being able to bring the course to where they want it to be on a daily, weekly, monthly level due to lack of funding, lack of personnel, etc. If that is you, hang in there and keep plugging.

Ultimately though, I started putting the pieces together and decided that strange fate had worked in my favor again. Had I not taken the time to stare at the lake, I would not have picked up twigs off the putting green. Had I not picked the twigs, I would not have met Steve. If I had not met Steve, not only would I have not made a very nice new friend in the industry, but we most definitely would have been trapped on the second floor for a lot longer than we would have otherwise. It was kind of like the DirecTV commercials only in reverse. I am a firm believer in if you do good things, good things will happen to you and as I age, the concept of fate, and every action will have either a positive or negative reaction seems to come into play more and more.

At the end of the DirecTV ads, the announcer proudly proclaims "Don't sell your hair to a wig shop," or "Don't wind up in a roadside ditch." I am here to say: "Always stop to pick up twigs on a neighbor's putting green."