

When is Enough, Enough?

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As I sit alone in my office in front of this empty computer screen, I silently think to myself, "Doh! Only 12 more hours and Fred is going to be telephoning me asking for yet another thought-provoking article." (My critics might still be looking for my first thought-provoking article.) My head begins to ache as I stare aimlessly at the keyboard, praying, hoping the keys will start typing on their own. No such luck. I knew I should not have missed church today. If all else fails, there's always the weather to write about. Now that is desperation! What was I thinking? Anything but that! Is there still time to walk away? Maybe a simple change of scenery will do. Couple that with joining a witness protection program and a quick change of identity and I'll be in business. Now there's a crazy thought. Nah. Besides, chances are I would be relocated to Montana. And you guessed it, a Mr. Fred Opperman would be my new neighbor . . . still waiting patient-

ly for my article no less. I guess it is hardly worth all that trouble. The change of scenery, though—there's an idea. How about a good old-fashioned walk to get the creative juices flowing? Just can't wander too far; the clock is still ticking. And me with a grandfather clock chiming in my

moving in for the duration. Fred, can you wait until spring for that article? I thought not.

Which brings me back to my one and only idea, "the weather." Sorry guys, but hear me out. Now, is it just me, or is the golfing season in the Chicagoland area getting longer? I look at the calendar and it says the end of February, but the lack of snow cover and the above-normal temperatures we have experienced sure make it seem like the end of March instead. Winter cannot be over yet, can it? According to my records, our average golf course opening for Bartlett Hills since 1990 has been March 21. The average date for closing the golf course has been November 28. In 1998, Bartlett Hills opened for regular play on February 22 and we finally closed the course on December 18. That means the 1998 golfing season at Bartlett Hills was a full 48 days longer than the average golfing season for the last eight years.

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head. The pressure begins to build, palms start to sweat, chest muscles tighten, breathing is a bit more difficult. If you have not guessed by now, it would seem I'm suffering from all the typical symptoms of *authorous blocktarus*; in words other than Dr. Randy Kane would understand, "writers block." I would have to say it's not only setting in, but will be



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Now, I realize that 1998 was a fluke weather year and not every year will end up like the last. But the point I would like to convey is this. If you have the power, weigh all of your options before deciding to extend the golfing season longer than anticipated. We must remember that we are in the business of providing a pleasurable golfing experience to our patrons. But at what cost should this be allowed? An extension of the golfing season has the perceived advantage of bringing in unexpected revenue. And this is true to a point. However, I would like to point out a few intangibles that are often left out of consideration when deciding when is enough, enough.

1. Whether early in the season or late, as a supervisor you must realize you will be short on maintenance personnel. What it takes 10-15 people to maintain in the summer, you now have to accomplish with three to five. And although the turfgrass growth pattern is slowing down, which requires less mowing, ball mark and divot repairs will seem like an endless journey.
2. Obviously, the turf is slow to recover from injury at these times of the year. Trying to keep up with repairs will be frustrating at best. Damage done in the fall is still present come next spring.
3. An extension of the golfing season always leaves less time for winter maintenance of machinery and equipment and/or winter projects. It looks like this winter, we will have only had approximately 50-60 working days to complete our winter maintenance program on all of our

equipment and winter golf course projects. We normally have 80-90 working days to do the same amount of work.

4. An extension at the end of the season will force you into predicting the weather. Your window of opportunity closes quickly later in the year. Do not get caught waiting too long to accomplish all your late fall tasks, such as snow mold prevention applications and covering greens.
5. Extended seasons never leave you and your staff enough time to close the golf course. It takes a couple of days just to bring in all the golf course items, such as signs, ropes, flags, benches, tee markers, etc. It takes even longer if you're trying to do it in the snow.

6. Last, the bottom line is not always the bottom line. Consider all labor costs when deciding whether to extend the golfing season or not. That black number you are seeing may quickly turn red.

I hope I have highlighted a few key points in your decision-making process and made everyone realize there is give and take with almost everything we do. Do not let bottom-line numbers cloud your thinking. Do what is best for you and your course. And if that fails, let your manager and golf pro help you cover those greens during a snowstorm when the ground is already frozen. Not something they will soon forget, I can assure you of that! 

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