

# Black Monday

*Now that the summer has come and gone, it's time to start clearing the course of leaves, and blowing out the irrigation system. It's also a good time for a little reflection.*

*... it appeared to be the dawn of a typical day. I had the normal little headaches that go along with getting everyone out on their first task . . . Finally, with everyone on their way, I walked out of the shop and to my surprise, there it was: the mighty "dollar spot."*

Looking back at my first season as superintendent at Trappers Turn Golf Club, a 27-hole, four-star course in central Wisconsin, I feel quite satisfied and proud. My crew made many improvements, tackled unforeseen obstacles and upgraded the quality of the course in general. The season of 2002 was an overall success, however, nothing came easily. One day in particular comes to mind. It was a day that seemed never to end. I refer to it as "Black Monday."

It was a dewy morning in mid-July. The day started out at 4:45 a.m. with a very heavy fog. Back in the shop, it appeared to be the dawn of a typical day. I had the normal little headaches that go along with getting everyone out on their first task. We had equipment problems and some communication hang-ups because my crew consists of Hispanic and Polish-speaking laborers. Finally, with everyone on their way, I walked out of the shop and to my surprise, there it was: the mighty "dollar spot." It was everywhere, resembling a fresh dusting of snow on an October morning—but this was July.

I jumped on my cart and peeled out to take a closer look at the severity of the invasion. The fungus was everywhere except the greens, tees and fairways. Remaining calm, cool and collected, I went ahead to the clubhouse to talk to the assistant general manager about the day's play and get some much-needed coffee. Little did I know what other surprises the day held for me; if I had, I might have chosen something stronger than coffee.

At roughly 6:05 a.m., following another short go-around on the course, I pulled up to the maintenance shop. As I walked toward my office, I noticed water on the floor just outside the door. Naturally, I followed the water to its source, which was the toilet, and she was overflowing. After applying some quick intervention and chanting a few choice words, I got the water to stop. I proceeded to get the mop and clean up the mess.

As I was putting the mop and bucket away, feeling somewhat relieved, in came my fairway operator, Joe, looking quite troubled. I said, "What's up?" (I recalled that this was only his second time mowing fairways.)

"I just got done mowing one and five, and I can't get the units to come up," said Joe. So I said, "Let's go look." As we drove out to the area, I was thinking the worst. When we arrived, I saw that the worst had happened. A hydraulic hose had burst and oil-stripped two fairways at mowing direction six-twelve. With a few additional turns in front of the green, along with two clean-up laps, I could only imagine what the grass would look like in a few days' time. What was I to say? I took a deep breath and began counting backward from 100 to regain my composure. Then I said, "Joe, at least your lines are getting straighter." From then on, we fondly referred to him as "Joe slick."

When I got back to the shop, it dawned on me that the mechanic was in Sturgis for a motorcycle rally until Thursday. I radioed the assistant and told him of the latest challenge. Then I headed off to a neighboring course 10 min-

*(continued on page 30)*

utes away to borrow some product that would assist the oil-soaked grass in its recovery.

I returned 30 minutes later and was greeted by the rough-mower operator, Jim.

“I got the tractor up against a tree,” Jim said.

“Let’s go take a look,” I said. On the way out to the area, I was thinking to myself, “How bad can this be?” When I got there, the tractor was up against two trees, it had two blown tires and the mowing deck was jackknifed. To top it off, this grisly scene played out on the side of the steepest hill on the course. After surveying the damage, Jim and I headed back to the shop to get the proper tools and equipment to free the pretzel. It took about an hour to free everything and get the tractor to a safe place where we could repair the tires. I determined that it was a good time for lunch. So what if it was only 10:30 in the morning.

After lunch my assistant, Scott, and I went back to repair the fairway unit that was still sitting on the cart path in a puddle of oil. With the blown hose replaced, I was sure the rest of the day would go smoothly. Boy, was I mistaken.

“Dale, do you copy?” came a voice over my radio.

“Go ahead,” I answered, a little gun-shy now.

“Well we got a situation here . . . the rough tractor is in the lake . . . it’s stuck.”

I called back and laughed, “Yeah, right,” thinking someone was playing some kind of sick joke on me, the kind of thing the guys like to do when I’m stressed. I put the radio down and resumed work on the mower. A few minutes later, a desperate “Are you coming?” came over the radio followed by a request for the four-wheel drive and some chains. At that moment, I knew it wasn’t a joke.

I went back to the shop to get a chain, which is when I got a telephone call from Andy Putzer, my other assistant. He wanted to report that a bee had stung an employee, and now the poor guy was having an allergic reaction. I instructed Andy to get him directly to the clinic.

Soon, I arrived at Mystic Lake to find the tractor stuck in the mud on the lake’s edge. My other rough operator, Dick, assisted as I hooked the chains around the axle and pulled her clear. The rescue went smoothly . . . ah, something was finally going my way.

I returned to the shop as the crew began to return, one by one, parking the equipment for the evening. After everyone had punched out, Andy pulled into the lot with the young bee-sting victim. This had been one of the longest days of my life and I was glad to see it come to an end. I looked at Scott and Andy and suggested that we head straight to Monk’s, the local watering hole. That good old barley and hops does wonders.

*“I got the tractor up against a tree,” rough-mower operator Jim said . . . On the way out to the area, I was thinking to myself, “How bad can this be?” When I got there, the tractor was up against two trees, it had two blown tires and the mowing deck was jackknifed. To top it off, this grisly scene played out on the side of the steepest hill on the course.*

So when you’re having a bad day, think of me and remember . . . while I try to forget . . . that foggy morning in mid-July now known as “Black Monday.”



On Course . . . (continued from page 3)

Okay, that covers the 2001-2002 Board of Directors. Now it’s time to thank the people who staff the Association. Thanks to Cathy Miles Ralston for being so patient waiting for my president’s messages, then doctoring them up when they were late. Thanks to George Minnis, who does it all and is really the most important asset our Association has.

Wait—I am not done yet!! Thanks to outgoing president emer-

tus Brian Bossert for the guidance, support and help he gave me this year. Finally, thank you to the membership for the confidence you showed in electing me your president.

In closing, I have enjoyed my tenure as president. It truly has been a learning experience and a great responsibility. I hope my ramblings during the year gone by have answered some of those questions you may have had and maybe got all

of you thinking a little more. I look forward to enjoying the end of the month once again, rather than racing to meet an *On Course* deadline.

Again, my deepest thanks—and my best wishes to the 2003 Board as they carry on in all the pursuits that make the Midwest an outstanding organization and one of the GCSAA’s exemplary chapters.

