

MIDWEST BREEZES

Charles Anfield, CGCS, *Heritage Bluffs Golf Course*



“League Night”

There seems to be common thread among many professionals in our industry that the last thing they want to do with their “free” time, is spend it on another golf course. But on every Wednesday night, since 1993 a group of golf industry people have gathered during their “busy” season to play golf. It’s the Fox Valley Golf League, played at Blackberry Oaks Golf Course in Bristol, Illinois.

Why do they do it? Family time is lost, some guys need to leave work a little early, baseball and soccer games are missed, and valuable personal time is dedicated to this one night. Some people will travel for almost an hour, just to tee it up. Sacrifices are made. Why do they “waste” their time and “suffer”, chasing a little white ball around?

Mike Hatton, Regional Sales Representative for EZ GO, is one of the newest members. He comes from a background as an Assistant Golf Professional and explains why he joined the league. “Being new to the region, I wanted to meet people in the industry. As a salesman I want to try to build relationships with people in the area”. Mike let me tell you, you can build better relationships if you play better “customer golf” (lose more matches) Mike carries a questionable 2 handicap and he can hit it a ton.

The league’s season is 16 weeks long, running from early May until early September. Play consists of nine holes of match play and medal play. One point is awarded for each with a bonus point awarded just for showing up. Handicaps are established and play is all net. Prizes, in the form of Pro Shop gift

certificates are awarded at the end of the season. Most of the focus is on fun, but boys will be boys and bragging rights are at stake. I have heard rumors of cash money games being played. At times some of the language on the course becomes “colorful” and would embarrass a sailor. Last week, one player nicknamed the “Volcano” for his explosive play made the statement after he just made a double bogey. “I hate this game, I’m going in, I’m quitting for the rest of the year”. He proceeded to play the final three holes in one under and won his match. Everyone in the five some was amused.

The league players comprise about a 50/50 split between vendors and superintendents. Only about one or two players are not members of the MAGCS. The total numbers of players has varied from year to year with upwards of 56 members to a low of 24. The course itself is nothing special. It’s always in great shape but it’s not overly difficult or has any notable holes that would rate on any top 100 list. So why do they come?

Paul Yerkes, Golf Sales Representative Agronomic Products- John Deere Golf, is one of the ‘founding fathers’ and serves as the “Director of Fun”. He says he stays in the league because “it’s one of the few times I can play golf”.

My own experience with the League has covered 11 years of making the trip up to Bristol. It has been a useful venue to get me “off campus”. It has also been beneficial to help satisfy my competitive urges. I served for three turbulent years as

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elected self proclaimed "Emperor of Golf". Decisions on handicaps and match rulings were handed down with either a thumbs up or down decision. I have since taken on a support role serving on the Board.

John Gurke, CGCS of Aurora Country Club has played in the league since its inception. John served as President during a transition period in the nineties during which time the League was plagued by upheaval and scandal. John continues to come to the "Club" because he says, "its' fun".

Todd Schmitz, Superintendent at Phillips Park Golf Course and MAGCS Board Member has played in the league since 2000. "I enjoy the camaraderie. I get to see the guys. The playing conditions are always good. They have great staff people there who make us feel welcome".

The most "interesting" time of the day is after play is completed and the members gather at 19th hole named "Ralphs Place". Cold beverages are served along with an excellent menu fare and the conversation gets lively. Lies are told, insults hurled about recklessly and unique alter egos emerge. Clothing ensem-



bles and odd golf swings become the targets of unbridled criticism. There has even been heard some questionable legal advice handed out by armchair lawyers. There are White Sox and Cub fans jawing with Cardinal fans. Things today are much tamer than in days of yore when popcorn fights were commonplace. Surprisingly, not that much business is spoken about. No one is trying sell anyone anything except maybe B.S. Sure, some busi-

ness is talked about and you put a bunch of turf nerds together and yeah, growing grass can become the main topic. Rates, products, player stories and general turf concerns are discussed, cried about and lamented.

The bottom line is that it's Wednesday. Its' hump day, league night, game time. It's time to play golf and hang out with the boys. It's a time to get away from everything and go to the "Club". It's the perfect night to break the week in half and recharge the batteries to gear up for the weekend. The Fox Valley Golf League has been has been a sanctuary for its members for over 15 years.

Would you like to play? **-OC**



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