

For many in our industry, 2002 was the year from hell. Rounds were down, new course openings evaporated and Mother Nature delighted in finding new and exotic ways to kill turf.

But there were a few bright spots amid the gloom. Thus, we're pleased to present our tribute to the best and worst of 2002.

Best Performance in the Spotlight: The winner — hands down — was our good friend Jim Nicol and his team at Hazeltine National GC who, when faced with torrential rains halfway through the PGA Championship, calmly oversaw the process of moving about a bazillion gallons of H₂O off the golf course. Noah wouldn't have needed the ark if he had these guys.

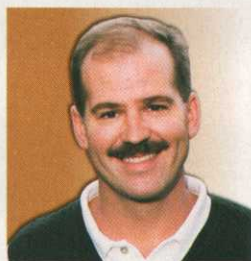
Worst Case of Gucci-in-Mouth: We must go with Masters chairman Hootie Johnson, who was obviously out practice-putting when they did the media training at Augusta. Instead of angrily blasting away with both barrels, he could have simply said, "We are within our well-established legal rights to accept whomever we wish for membership, and I'm sure that we'll one day accept a female member." End of story, end of pointless headache for our business.

Best Emerging Trend: I can't back it up with hard statistics, but it seems like more and more superintendents are moving into ownership roles. I'm talking to more and more who have "sweat equity" agreements that give them percentages of the operations. Even more common are superintendents who've set up small management/ownership groups and purchased a few nearby mom-and-pop facilities. Will superintendent/owners someday dominate the public golf market? Hey, we can dream can't we?

Worst Way to Make Lawyers Richer: Would someone please tell me why any club would hire a new general manager and then allow him to promptly fire a respected, long-time superintendent to bring in "his guy?" I've heard way too many of these horror stories this year, and it has to stop. Maybe some heavy publicity about all the illegal termination and age discrimination suits superintendents have filed against these boneheads would help. Hmmm ... that sounds like a job for *Golfdom*. Seriously, got an example and want to help? Contact me.

2002 Brought Out Best and Worst

BY PAT JONES



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Best Inside Joke: An anonymous superintendent who has a chainsaw nicknamed "Lightning," says, "When a member asks what happened to a tree we took out, we can look 'em right in the eye and say, 'Lightning' got it."

Worst Timing: On the heels of proposing a 20-percent dues increase, publicly acknowledging investment losses, and raising prices for educational seminars and trade show space, GCSAA offered critics a perfect opening by sending a generous contingent of staff, officers and spouses to England for the Ryder Cup. Is a dues increase overdue and probably justifiable? Sure. Is it good for GCSAA to be represented at major golf events? Yup. Do long-suffering spouses deserve an occasional perk to make up for all the time board of directors' members spend away from home? Unquestionably. Should the association have seen this coming and avoided raising the whole silly issue by just sending just the CEO and president? Yes.

The truth is that the association has operated in the red for the past two years. Managing costs, particularly discretionary expenses like these, is important for the fiscal integrity of the organization and for the integrity of its image with the members. The real issue is how an organization that is facing revenue challenges and asking for more money will respond to calls for clearer, more detailed financial reporting.

So, on that interesting note, we bid a not-so-fond farewell to 2002. What will the year ahead hold in store? Darned if I know. Hey, if I could predict the future, I wouldn't be using my Enron stock certificates as fireplace kindling.

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