

Black Monday

BY DALE MORRISON

It began as a typical day, but whatever could go wrong did go wrong. It was one of the longest days of my life, but I'm here to tell you that I survived

NIow that the summer is gone, it's time to start clearing the course of leaves, and blowing out the irrigation system. It's also a good time for reflection.

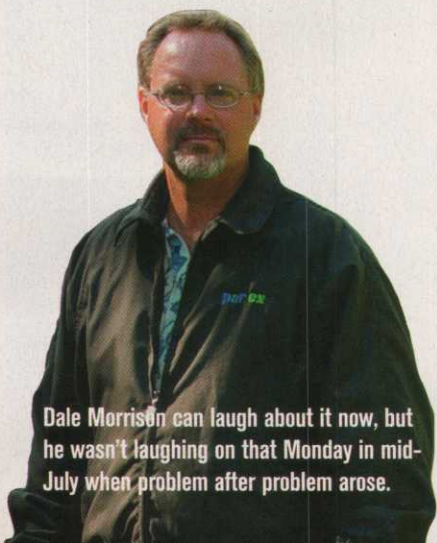
Looking back at my first season as superintendent at Trappers Turn GC, a 27-hole course in central Wisconsin, I feel quite satisfied and proud. My crew made many improvements, tackled unforeseen obstacles and upgraded the quality of the course in general. The season was an overall success.

However, nothing came easily. One day in particular comes to mind. It was a day that seemed to never end. I refer to it as "Black Monday."

It was a dewy morning in mid-July. The day began at 4:45 a.m. with a heavy fog. Back in the shop, it appeared to be the start of a typical day. I had the normal little headaches that go along with getting everyone out on their first tasks. 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 a November 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

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Dale Morrison can laugh about it now, but he wasn't laughing on that Monday in mid-July when problem after problem arose.

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clubhouse to talk to the assistant general manager about the day's play and to get some much-needed coffee. Little did I know what other surprises the day held for me, or 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 it 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, I saw 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 No. 1 and No. 5, and I can't get the units to come up," Joe said.

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-12. 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. 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." (We fondly refer to him as "Joe Slick" now.)

When I got back to the shop, it dawned on me that the mechanic was away 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 minutes 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

After Black Monday, Joe Scully, who mows fairways at Trappers Turn, was referred to affectionately as "Joe Slick."





PHOTOS BY ERIC FISHER

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 jack-knifed. To top it off, this grizzly 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 to 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.

"Well, we have a situation here. The rough tractor is in the lake, and it's stuck."

I called back and laughed, "Yeah right." I thought someone was playing a 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 call ("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. That's when I got a telephone call from Andy, 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. 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-stung victim. This had been one of the longest days of my life, and I was glad to see it come to an end.

So, when you're having a bad day, think of me and remember — while I try to forget — that foggy morning in mid-July known as "Black Monday." ■

Veteran superintendent Morrison has had better days than Black Monday, but hopefully he won't have one worse. He can be reached at trapperssupt@yahoo.com.

Morrison's first assistants, Scott Murkve (left) and Andy Putzer (center), made it through Black Monday with him.