

## Off The Fringe

# A Week in the Life

MARCH MADNESS MEANS IT'S TIME TO PREPARE FOR ANOTHER SEASON – IF MOTHER NATURE ALLOWS YOU

By Jim Black

**A**s usual in the transition zone, a soft 3-inch blanket of snow arrives in between days of promising warmth. I come to work on a Sunday morning and hook up the plow to my truck. I do this mainly for the fun of it because I'm sure that within a couple hours I will have missed the opportunity. Temperatures are supposed to climb back into the low 50s.

A quick and chilly ride around the course reveals that the greens are the last place the snow will melt, much to the dismay of the pro and the members. I, of course, welcome the respite

for the sake of the turf. This old course has seen so many years of 50,000 rounds that even it deserves a few days off.

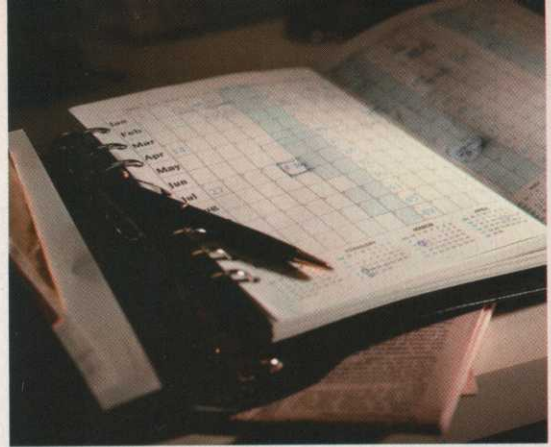
Monday comes and even with bright sun and temperatures in the upper 40s you learn that even a leafless tree provides enough shade to keep snow from melting. And even though it's comfortable outside, some of the cart paths are still impassable because of the same treeless shade.

So it's back to the shop. Clean, sweep, straighten, grind. Organize and put away. Six trips to the dumpster. Then, after four hours of bumping into

each other, you send half the crew home at lunch because there's only so much you can do this time of year. My afternoon is spent in the office, planning and plotting for whatever surprises Mother Nature may decide to throw my way this year.

Tuesday. Snow still lingers on six of my putting surfaces. The owner and the pro are starting to drop hints of opening soon for the sake of off-season revenue. I decide it's time to take a much-needed 18-hole winter walk. Rose, my trusty Airedale/German Shepherd pound puppy and I head out.

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First, it's down to the lakes to spook up the geese and encourage them to find a new place for their swimming and pooping. Rose is a goose-herding natural, and after 10 minutes or so the flock takes the hint and noisily lifts off and heads out.

Our hike around the front nine reveals that, indeed, four greens guarded by southern trees are still covered and icy. Even with a warm sun, air temperatures in the mid-40s keep the greens unplayable and off-limits. We can, however, use the front-end loader to remove the slush from the path to make it passable.

On the back nine, one green is still covered and one is questionable. There's a length of path down the hill on number 15 that could be salted to make it driveable enough for a golf car, but the rest of the back is clear sailing. Decision time.

**The busy work is plentiful right now, and once the weather breaks a little we can get outside and tend to the trees.**

Wednesday morning the phone rings. It's the club owner. "Well? What does it look like out there?" My mind switches from turf to business, the business of revenue at our public course.

"With a little creativity," I say, "we could probably choose nine holes today after the frost."

"Will that be OK for the greens? I don't want to rush things if we don't have to."

Setting my ego aside, I agree saying, "If we keep on the paths, the frost should go away and it'll be OK."

I don't know if she's seen the forecast yet, but the weatherman has promised another 2 inches tonight. What can one day hurt?

I call the pro and nine holes are agreed upon. I stay in my office the rest of the day to avoid all the questions, such as, "Will you open more later?"

On the business side, the cash register rings to life again, if only for a little while. It's better than nothing.

Thursday morning I wake up and peek out the window. The forecast was incorrect. There are 4 inches of new snow instead of the predicted 2. I silently rejoice, thankful that rest again will come for this old course.

Rose and I carefully make our way to work. Two of my trusted and faithful employees are already there. Gary has made his way in thanks to his Jeep, and James is the ever-present resident. The three of us work to clear and salt the as-

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phalt — a path in from the main road, and two driveways for the only two houses on the course. After three hours we call it a day. We deserve the rest just like the course. Tomorrow we'll be busy once again.

The turf management part of me is starting to feel impatient, but at the same time a wiser part of me knows that 14-hour days are again only a few short weeks away.

Friday greets the mid-Atlantic with an expected high temperature of 37 degrees. I'll have a two-thirds crew today to help with the grinding, oil changing, ball-washer painting and shop reorganizing. Luckily, there is enough of that right now to keep them all busy for an eight-hour day.

The busy work is plentiful right now, and once the weather breaks a little we can get outside and attend to the trees.

In the transition zone, we could have almost any kind of weather pattern, and we are at the mercy of whatever Mother Nature throws our way. One thing I do know is that on this particular Saturday morning, I am able to enjoy the luxury of sleeping in.

The opportunity to recharge your batteries is a rare gift for a greenkeeper. Accept that gift when you can.

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*Black is superintendent of Twin Shields GC in Dunkirk, Md.*

## Un-Bear-Able

CANADIAN SUPERINTENDENT  
BATTLES BRUINS

By James E. Guyette

**A** situation at the Sparwood GC in Sparwood, B.C., is creating a "grizzly" situation for superintendent Rod Uhl. During the spring and fall, ursine invaders make almost nightly forays onto the nine-hole course.

Weighing up to 1,000 pounds, the marauding grizzlies are particularly partial to the pins — frequently snapping them in two like toothpicks.

"They pick up the scents of everyone who grabs the flagsticks, and the bears are rubbing up against them to leave their own scents," Uhl says.

The bears make the rounds of other course features, too, targeting distance markers and anything else they can get their huge paws on.

"They dig the cups right out, and they also dig-up our irrigation heads," Uhl says. Recently, "the majority of the practice course mats were flipped over, and one of them was shredded." The mat mayhem is especially puzzling because they're made of synthetic materials.

It's hard to figure out why the



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bears like the course. Insects aren't prevalent because of the rural region's rugged climate, and "we have a very stringent garbage control program" to eliminate other bear-type treats, Uhl adds.

A barking dog is no solution, as a canine could quickly become a snack. And applying typical bear repellents to the pins won't work because any product that the bears find foul is going to end-up on the hands of members lining up their putts. "I can't have my golfers getting *that* on themselves," Uhl says, noting that the bears' mischievous attraction to the links remains a vexing mystery.

Uhl seeks advice from those who've had bear problems. He can be reached at [sparwoodgolf@netscape.net](mailto:sparwoodgolf@netscape.net).

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*Guyette is a free-lance writer from Cleveland.*

## The Major Challenge Is Back

Good news for you golf fanatics: The Major Challenge is back. If you have a hunch about which Tour players will dominate the Majors this year, here's a chance to play out that hunch and win prizes.

John Deere and *Golfdom* have again joined forces to present the second annual Major Challenge, an online fantasy golf competition for superintendents and other turfheads who want to test their luck against colleagues around the world.

The object of the contest is simple, says Mike Scaletta, advertising manager for Deere's golf/turf division. "You pick the six players you think will score best in each of the four Major tournaments and their combined stroke score is your score in the Challenge," he says. "You can change players and tinker with your team any time up to the day before each event. It's fun, and it's free."

The Major Challenge contest events are, of course, the Masters, U.S. Open,

British Open and PGA Championship. An all-expense paid trip to the John-Deere Classic to play in the Pro/Am awaits each winner of those events. The John Deere Classic will be held at the Tournament Players Club at Deere Run in September in Silvis, Ill.

You can register online now by visiting [www.majorchallenge.com/golf](http://www.majorchallenge.com/golf). Contest information, complete rules, eligibility, standings, stats and player information are also available on the site.

So log on, sign up, have fun and win.