



DAWN

By Monroe S. Miller

If a golf course superintendent should wonder why he ever wanted to manage a golf course, the answer is here at this early hour. The ultimate reward isn't always in a paycheck or even in the appearance of the course at tournament time.

Rather, it is quite often the realization of an opportunity to work in and around and with nature. It is the miracle of buds and blossoms, of the grass plants we culture and of the autumn color I'm beginning to see. Part of the reward that keeps me continually interested in watching the sun rise so many mornings of the year.

Dawn is the very best time of the day. I must have seen two or three thousand sunrises in my life. And no two of them have been exactly alike. The colors always change and you can nearly see it happen. I've also sensed that my golf course always looks ever so close to perfect at dawn; maybe that is another reason why I like this time of each day the best.

This morning, so cool and crisp and so typical of autumn in Wisconsin, I arrived extra early with the sole intention of watching the day dawn over Blackhawk. I carried the bench from the third tee to the backside of the second green. Dawn's arrival on our golf course is seen best from there; it is, as they say, the best seat in the house.

Autumn sunlight is the perfection of the day. Even though it is chilly, the cool air feels good this morning. It makes my cup of fresh coffee taste even better and my sweatshirt espe-

cially comfortable. Only a month ago the days were hot; this morning's coolness is a welcome relief.

The first rays bathe the hilltop where our clubhouse sits and the trees there that are so familiar can be seen. It seems like only yesterday that the leaves on the trees were new and barely large enough to catch a breeze.

From where I am sitting, on a promontory on the west end of the golf course looking east, the early morning light makes the fairways look smooth and bright and anxious for players. The illusion my vantage point presented had all of the fairways that I could see sloping up and toward the clubhouse. They were glittering with morning dew.

One of the great things about this morning, and all other sunrises, is the solitude offered. It's a wonderful time to be alone to think and plan and contemplate. No telephone, no people, no machinery, no traffic. In fact, this morning was so peaceful and tranquil and static I felt like an intruder. Except for the birds, no living or man-made thing intruded motion anywhere I could see. Only at dawn can you experience something like these precious few minutes which show the patience of eternal time.

I suspect the fact that I've gotten up early for most of my life contributes to my love of the early morning. Dairy herds have to be milked and many chores done before rural kids can head off to school. That necessity becomes habit; habit slowly evolves to a love — a love of the time and all it offers. Farm

kids who become golf course superintendents have an advantage in that regard.

I chuckle a bit, however, when I read what an old New Englander, Daniel Webster, had to say about dawn: "The morning itself, few inhabitants of cities know anything about. Among all our good people, not one in a thousand sees the sun rise once a year. They know nothing of the morning. Their idea of it is that it is part of the day which comes along after a cup of coffee and a piece of toast. . . . The first streak of light, the earliest purpling of the east, which the lark springs up to greet, and deeper and deeper coloring into orange and red 'til at length the glorious sun is seen, regent of the day — this they never enjoy for they never see it. . . . We see as fine risings of the sun as ever Adam saw: and its risings are as much a miracle now as they were in his day. . . ."

He assumed only rural folks see the dawn. I forgive him because when he wrote those lines there weren't any golf courses. Now that there are, more of us "city inhabitants" know something of sunrises than apparently did in his day.

I like daybreak in all seasons; the differences among the four are amplified at this hour. Dawn in the summertime is noisy. The birds start singing while it is still dark. On those days when the sun comes up through the trees, looking like a giant orange golf ball in the rough, you immediately know it is going to be a difficult day for grasses that are closely cut. A dawn like this activates your sixth sense; you immediately begin thinking about disease, irrigation system coverage and new trees which might be thirsty. Despite this, there is an interlude of loveliness over the golf course.

Dawns in early summer — June —

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are fresh and bright. They are also the earliest and the most generous. You usually are glad to see the sun in June. The leaves need the sunlight to feed the parent plants, plants that still are strong and vigorous.

Sunrise in mid-summer is the least comfortable. There is a murkiness from the high humidity; it is sultry, usually, despite the departing darkness. These are the days you worry about the most, the days when you really earn your salary. More than at any other time of the year, I can see and feel how the golf course has been renewed by the night. Although it may not always appear completely refreshed, you can sense that at least it appears rested for another hot summer day.

By the time August brings us late summer, the sultry humidity has given way to more misty mornings. Mist settles in over the valley that divides our golf course east and west. Sometimes

it is nearly 8:00 o'clock before we can see our pond, so misty has it been.

I think the course looks almost spooky on some of these mornings. The mist makes the bumps and mounds and moguls in the landscape look like giant animals or something. Morning fog of late summer makes you think you're on unfamiliar ground — many times I've nearly driven through sand bunkers that seemingly appeared out of nowhere. The trees have no tops. The sun, however, only takes a short time to restore everything to its place. The mystery and fantasy disappear quickly.

By this time, I always notice how quiet sunrise has become. There are only a few bird calls now; the noise of three months previous is gone. Dawn tells you the force of the summer has been spent.

If I were to guess, I'd bet that golf course superintendents see more

springtime dawns than any other season's. Spring is when we have an unusual amount of work to do and the fewest number of people to do it. Early to bed and early to rise was the prescription given by *Poor Richard's Almanac* for health and wealth and wisdom, and it's been my observation that most of us follow that advice in spring.

Spring sunshine is the real awakener of golf courses. Starting sometime in mid-February, the dawn of each new day carries with it a sense of change, regardless of the temperature. You can usually tell at daybreak whether or not it will be a day when the sap will flow in the sugar maples, sap that will be the maple syrup you'll buy at your local Farmer's Market before too much longer.

The dawn's arrival moves back quite quickly in spring, or so it seems. It is an hour earlier at the end of March than it was at the month's beginning.

THE GENTLE GIANTS

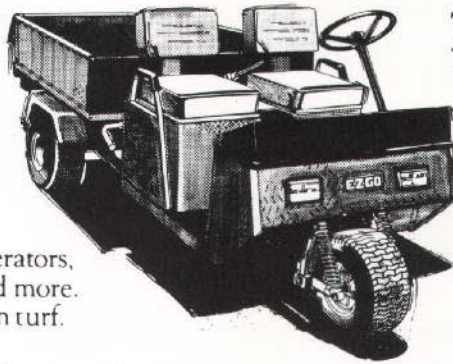
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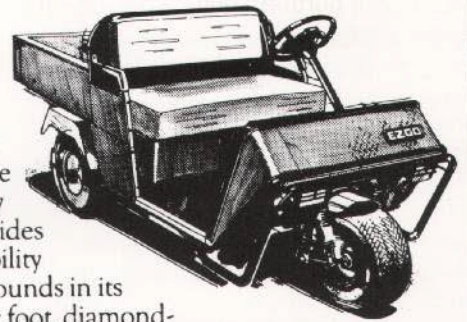
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The sunrise is moving each day, quickly, from the southeast to the northeast. Each morning's progress is almost noticeable — "from Hoyt Park to Lake Mendota in a few short days" is how I describe it.

Henry Thoreau once wrote, "An early morning walk is a blessing for the whole day." That is especially true for the wintertime on a golf course in Wisconsin. Usually there isn't much you can do, yet you want to stay in touch with the course. Since sunrise comes so late in the winter, this is an excellent time to watch the stars and moon disappear as the sun lights the eastern sky and then the golf course.

A golf course is surprisingly beautiful on those cold days. If you're lucky and walk it on a morning when the trees and shrubs and every blade of grass are covered with hoarfrost, you'll be overwhelmed at what the first daylight does to them. The fact that the grass is crunchy underfoot will make you choose your path and route carefully. But you'll be rewarded as the sun rises and the entire golf course literally dazzles.

Early winter sunlight is a token of rest, the long sleep that I believe makes our northern golf course so special during the other three seasons.

"When God sends the dawn, he sends it for all," Cervantes said. He was right. All you have to do is be there. And I think most of us who love the work of golf courses are there.

"Just as sure as sunrise."

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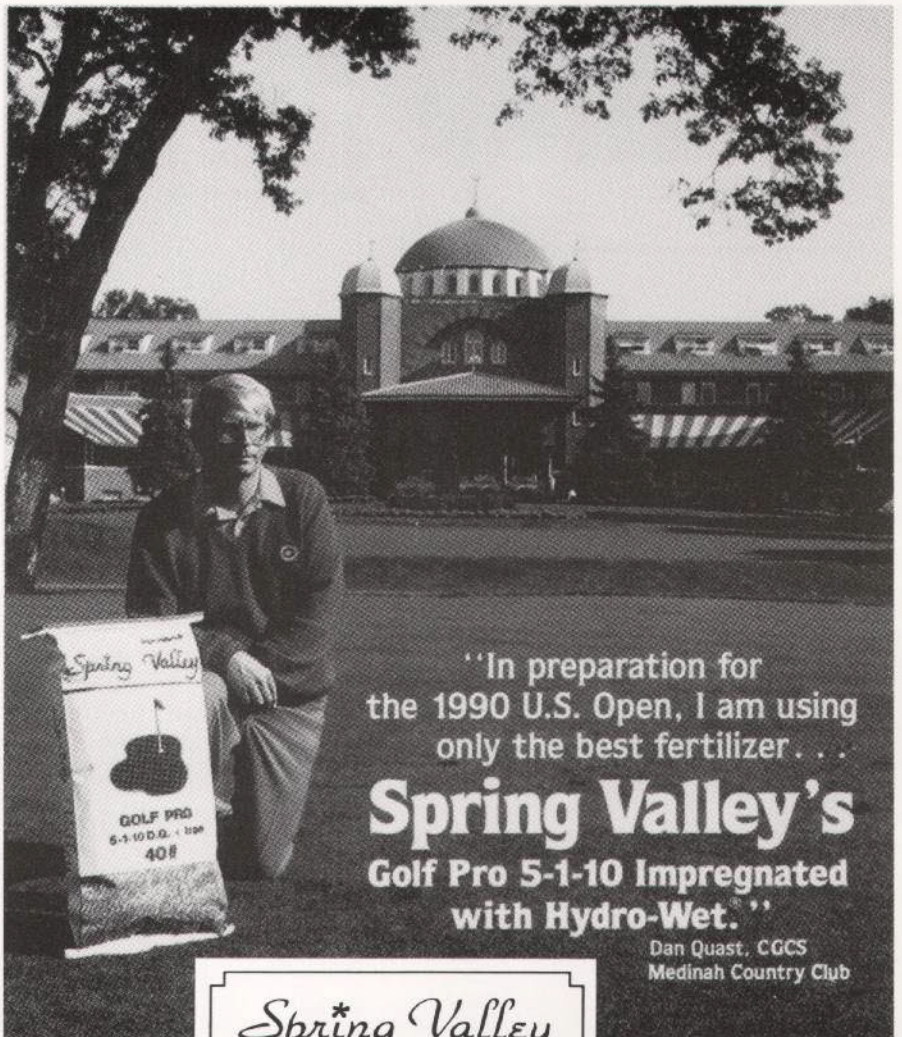
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