



A Course Fit For A King ... And His Pocketbook

By Rob Schultz

Anyone who has waited impatiently for over three hours to tee off at any of Madison's incredibly busy public golf courses can hardly hold back their excitement to when the University of Wisconsin golf course opens this summer.

A great course. Open to the public. Well-conditioned. It's a dream.

Wake up sleepy head. Go back to Odana Hills. Unless you've got a fat wallet, this course is not for you.

That is the message the financially-strapped UW athletic department will be sending when officials there announce their greens fees plan sometime in mid-March.

Unfortunately, that is the wrong message. It'll cost the general public \$29 to play 18 holes during the week and \$35 on weekends. Most golfers will want to take a cart on the hilly, long layout and that will cost another \$9.

Do you think the wife will let you drop \$40—not including the losses from the \$2 Nassau—and play the UW course every Friday afternoon with the boys? Try it and you'll have to get a proctologist to extract your Ping from that funny-looking dark head cover.

UW athletic department officials, some of whom belong to swank joints because their business expenses pay for it, decided that they don't want to compete with the Odana Hills and Yahara Hills courses that attract golfers like Saddam Hussein attracts F-15s.

My question is "Why not compete with Odana Hills and Yahara Hills?" They are, perhaps, two of the world's most ordinary golf courses and they rake in immensely outrageous amounts of money each year. It's so disgusting that it's humorous. Golfers walk down the fairway constantly complaining about the courses' condition—especially at Odana—yet they plop down their \$10 to play it three or four times a week.

Imagine if they had a great course—open to the public and well-conditioned—to play all the time for like, say, \$20. Adios Odana and Yahara. The UW athletic department budget deficit would disappear in a snap.

But the UW doesn't see it that way. Quality is the byword these days at 1440 Monroe St. They want to make the course like 'da Bluff, or Nakoma, or—egad—Arizona Biltmore or Blackwolf Run. These are courses they can afford—or their department pays for—to play.

UW officials fear that it wouldn't be good for the course to be trampled a la Odana. So they jacked the prices for the average golfer so: No. 1, it won't be as busy. No. 2, it can compensate for the lack of traffic.

Unfortunately, the UW is going about it the wrong way. School officials are telling Madison area golfers that they don't understand quality; that they'd prefer to have their course filled with Chicago area golfers.

There is nothing wrong with trying to maintain a quality golf course. The trick is maintaining a quality golf course without upsetting the main client base. That's something the UW is failing to comprehend.

UW officials feel there is a niche for an expensive, quality course in Madison. I feel there is a niche for an affordable, quality course in Madison. The UW's version is easier to set up; just jack the rates. My version is more difficult.

When the UW course opens in late May or early June, it will come full of bells and whistles. There will be free golf balls for everybody who plays it, custom service fit for a king. But the poor servants who have suffered at the likes of Odana Hills for years and are yearning to play a wonderful course on a regular basis, the greens fees at the UW course will serve as huge moat to a castle filled with out-of-state golfers.



Brown Deer Park, one of the state's best daily-fee courses, learned a lesson the hard way.

In the process of a major renovation, Brown Deer was supposed to be closed for the season last Aug. 15 so it could be completely re-seeded with bentgrass.

But Milwaukee County Parks Department director Brigid Sullivan decided to keep the course open through Labor Day weekend to get some extra revenue and the completion of seeding was delayed about three weeks.

Unfortunately, the late seeding didn't fill in the entire course and portions of it must be re-seeded again this spring. This means that instead of opening in April as golfers were told to expect, Brown Deer won't open until June.

So, not only will that move upset Milwaukee area golfers, but the original plan to make some money by delaying the seeding two or three weeks will probably cost them more money because a full two months of revenue will be lost. Also, the Wisconsin PGA, which was supposed to operate the course for the county, pulled out and will not begin operations there until 1992.

"We understood we were taking a gamble... but I would assume that by the first or second week of June we are going to open at the latest," said Greg Youngs, the south regional manager for the Milwaukee County Parks Department who oversees the maintenance of its golf courses.



A new 27-hole golf course? A new practice facility with a bubble over it for year-round use? The completion of an executive 9-hole course addition at Yahara Hills?

Those are all some of the ideas City of Madison planners will be considering in the next few months as part of its future open space plan.

George Austin, the director of planning and development for the city, said a new city golf course—perhaps 18 or 27 holes—would be ideal to create open green space between the cities of Madison and Sun Prairie.

"I can't say it's likely or unlikely," he said. "It's just something we're taking a look at. If we think it's a feasible idea we'll look at potential sites."