



## What's the rush to open all these new courses?

By Rob Schultz

For one year, Jeff Parks had the University of Wisconsin golf course all to himself. It was like taking care of an infant. Young and vulnerable to all kinds of disease and bad elements, the golf course needed, and received, 12 months of tender loving care before the world was turned loose on it this summer.

That wasn't the case at Geneva National, Trappers Turn, Lawsonia Links and Brown Deer Park. Geneva National and Trappers Turn only got a few months of TLC before they opened. Lawsonia Links new 9-hole layout and Brown Deer's re-seeded greens and fairways only got a few weeks of TLC.

You'll see a huge difference between the UW course and the others if you walk all of them today. More important, you'll probably still notice the difference a few years from now.

I feared for Brown Deer—one of the state's best, and busiest, public courses—because it was still pocked and soft just one day before it re-opened.

Trapper's Turn opened with two or three of its greens full of more soil and mud than grass.

Lawsonia's new 9 had a horrible washout problem and hadn't seeded all of its holes yet this spring. But that didn't deter it from opening in July.

And everybody has said that Geneva National will be a pretty good course...someday. But it's hardly up to snuff now because it opened too early.

All of those aforementioned courses will be good ... someday. They'll be everything their marketing people are bragging about ... someday. But it probably won't be next year or the year after. And it's all because they opened too soon.

The reason for quick grand opening is simple. Money. Owners are shelling out anywhere from \$1 million to \$8 million to build these courses and they need to start seeing some returns. But opening too quickly is penny wise and pound foolish.

Unfortunately, golfers get bad feelings about these courses and don't come back. First impressions play a big factor

in golf and when greens don't have grass or your ball imbeds so deep in a soft fairway that you can't find it, you're not going to walk away impressed.

One of my neighbors ran over to my house a few days ago to complain about Trappers Turn. I write a golf course review column for my newspaper that's similar to the restaurant reviews you read in many other papers' feature sections. My neighbor demanded that I play Trappers Turn and rip its guts out in my column.

My neighbor's complaint wasn't as much the fact that Trappers Turn wasn't in good shape, it was that he had to pay the full greens fee to play it.

"They want to open it too soon? Fine," said my neighbor, who is a good golfer and plays about 100 rounds a year. "But then they should charge us half-price. I talked to the general manager there and he didn't agree with me. I told him I'm never, ever going to come back there. And I won't."

I knew exactly how my neighbor felt. I had a similar experience when Lawsonia opened its new 9-hole layout early in the 1980's. I couldn't believe they opened it so soon because the fairways were devoid of grass. It was fun to marvel at the incredible beauty, but you couldn't help getting disgusted at the bad bounces from the spots on the fairways and around the greens that never filled in.

So I never played those 9 holes until two or three years ago when they became close to the quality of the older 18. But there are still some bald spots on that newer layout today.

What all this means, and it's hard to believe I'm saying this, is that the UW did something right when it built its golf course. It has been packed to the rafters every day during a summer that has been either too wet or too dry. That one-year grow-in period was wise insurance because the greens and fairways still look good despite taking a horrible beating.

The state of Wisconsin has been blessed in recent years with an influx of

some new courses designed by some of the world's best architects—Arnold Palmer at Geneva National, Andy North at Trappers Canyon and Robert Trent Jones, Jr. at the UW.

But the layout doesn't mean beans if the owners don't let it grow in correctly. I'm one of those golfers in this state that the tourism bureau loves because I'll travel just about anywhere to play a good course. I eventually will make the rounds to play Lawsonia's new 9, Geneva National and Brown Deer Park again ... in about five years.

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