



## I'll Take An Automatic System

By Monroe S. Miller

The May edition of *WISCONSIN GOLF* was a pretty good issue for Wisconsin golf players to read.

It was an issue that featured a cover picture of irrigation sprinklers in action on the River Course at Blackwolf Run. The title on the front cover, "WATER—the No. 1 Resource" invited a look inside.

John Hughes reprinted Mark Kienert's excellent article on the Bull's Eye C.C. loss of Wisconsin River water for irrigation in 1988 that Mark authored for *GOLF COURSE MANAGEMENT*.

The lead story on water was written by Jeff Mayers, a *Wisconsin State Journal*/political reporter and occasional political commentator on WHA, our local PBS station.

Jeff interviewed lots of people, including many Wisconsin golf course superintendents and golf course owners. It was a well balanced story with good information.

There was only one comment I disagreed with and feel compelled to comment on.

Red Roskopf uses a manual irrigation system at Camelot, and it works well for him. My disagreement comes with Red's opinion that "with a manual system you will conserve more water."

I put up with a manual system for 16 years and have used an automatic irrigation system for the past four years.

My experience is contrary to Red's experience. No matter how hard a night waterman works at his job, watering times are never more than approximate. Those times are seldom short, either.

Since sprinklers have to be moved by hand, short times (sets) are almost impossible. I never once asked for a five minute time on a green sprinkler because I knew it couldn't be done.

Five minutes of water on greens with our automatic system is very common.

With a manual system, all fairway valves, for example, essentially received the same amount of water. It was merely a practical matter. A night waterman cannot begin to keep track of different times for different quick couplers. If he could, a Cushman truckster cannot travel fast enough from valve to valve to move the sprinklers, anyway.

Now, on an "average" summer night, the times on fairway sprinklers might range from three minutes to 17 minutes. Those times are based on what is best for the turf covered, the soils in residence there, and the desire to conserve water and use the least amount. You cannot do that with a manual system. Period.

Or, with our automatic system, we might split the times in half and run two cycles. This makes extremely efficient use of water and gives great opportunity for water conservation. You cannot do this with a manual system.

Our Toro Network 8000 automatic irrigation system controls the running times of sprinklers right down to the minute. Exactly. You can set a watch by the running time. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about a manual system. Watermen and trucksters can't offer that precise timing.

We were freed from other trouble when we replaced our manual system. No more vandalism of 808 sprinklers. One year we lost a dozen of them.

A night waterman cannot keep any semblance of a schedule when he's got a flat tire on his Cushman. That 20 minute set you ordered up was run out to over an hour.

And if flats weren't a problem, then some other mechanical ailment was. Weekly.

Over the years we had one pickup truck and two Cushman trucksters totaled as a result of accidents. Thank goodness no injuries resulted. That does not happen with an automatic system.

With our automatic irrigation system I no longer have to worry about an employee and a sudden lightning storm.

And just as we did with our manual system, before we leave work at days end, we decide what our water needs for the next 24 hours will be. We don't water "automatically" now any more than we did when our system was a manual one.

Not only do automatic systems conserve water, they conserve energy, too. It takes fifteen cents of electricity to turn sprinklers on and off during the night. With our manual system, it was not uncommon to burn ten gallons of gasoline moving sprinklers.

An automatic system with a carefully written program or with a concatenation feature maximizes the efficiency of a pump station, something that is nearly impossible, in my experience at least, with a manual system. More efficiency equals conservation in the pump house, too.

Frankly, my experience with a manual irrigation system and an automatic irrigation system has clearly shown the automatic system uses less water because it offers precise control and running times and allows enormous flexibility which can be used to conserve water.

But the amount of water used on any given golf course really comes down to the group served, its demands and the decisions made by the golf course superintendent responding to those demands, regardless of how the water is distributed.

But I'll still take an automatic.