



Remembering A Short Golf Season

By Rob Schultz

The past year marked the first time in 24 years that I didn't play golf in November.

My clubs are still in the trunk of my car. Waiting. Patiently. Yeah, I know there's snow on the ground. But I'm an optimist. There has got to be a forecast of a 40-degree day coming up soon. I'll use an orange ball.

The past year certainly was bizarre. No golf in November. For that matter, crummy weather meant there wasn't any golf in April, either. I hope this is just a phase the good earth is going through.

But the shortage of golfing days in 1992 didn't mean there wasn't a shortage of excitement. For the first time, I had the pleasure to walk on two of the finest golf courses in the world. I had the pleasure of witnessing my first hole-in-one. I had the pleasure of watching some exciting tournaments.

The good was mixed with the bad and the ugly, too. I watched a wonderful area pro get fired for no reason. I watched my favorite course go corporate. I got splattered on a highway in some God-forsaken place that seemed a million miles from home.

In other words it was a typical golf season. Here are the moments that stick out:

1) *Augusta National*. My trip with the Wisconsin State Golf Association to this piece of heaven was the highlight. Nine months later I can still smell the azaleas.

I'll never forget running into former Green Bay Packer coach Lindy Infante between the 15th and 16th fairways just after John Daly had rifled a long iron at the 15th green. Infante, still upset over being fired, didn't want to make any small talk with a reporter who covered his final day with the Green and Gold. I was being polite and was going to say hello, when he looked me up and down and said, "I guess they'll let anybody in here."

I responded by looking at his CBS-TV badge, then his face that was covered with ice cream, and saying, "I was thinking the same thing."

2) *Crystal Downs*. As I stood on the 17th tee of this mysterious place I gulped as I looked down at the fairway that was about as wide as my driveway. The hole was only 300-plus yards long. 300 yards of sheer fright. It epitomized the Crystal Downs experience.

"Just aim at that tree on the right side of the fairway," said Tuck Tate, who, with his wife, Becky, were my gracious hosts at Crystal Downs and were even more interesting than the course.

I followed Tuck's advice and hit the tree. I walked off with a double-bogey 6 and was happy.

What's amazing about Crystal Downs is that very few have heard of it. Designed by Alister Mackenzie shortly after he finished Augusta and Cypress Point, it's located on the western shore of Lake Michigan just north of Frankfort, Mich. and embodies all the features of Mackenzie's more famous courses.

3) *Vicky Welch*. It's hard to get choked up while watching a local women's golf tournament, but Vicky Welch managed to send waves of emotion through me and anybody else who watched her victory in Madison this summer.

Welch's father, Richard, died suddenly last winter. Since he was a tremendous supporter of the Madison women's tournament, it was decided to rename the championship trophy after him. Then Welch dedicated herself to win it for her dad.

Welch reached her goal with a late charge on the final round at her home course at Blackhawk Country Club that was capped by making a dangerous, 5-foot, left-to-right slider for birdie on the par-3 18th hole. That forced a playoff with Erika Brown. Welch won the championship, and the trophy, on the third hole.

Welch's comeback was totally unlike her. The 24-year-old had a reputation of collapsing late in tournaments. This time she said she felt she had guidance from above. She may have been right.

4) *Brown County Golf Course*. I played it in late July and was appalled. I enjoy Brown County because superintendent Paul Delfosse and his grounds crew work so hard to keep it in private-club condition. But a harsh winter left the course's fairways in horrible shape. It played, and looked, like any ordinary muni.

Then a great transformation occurred. Within three weeks it was back to its former condition. In fact, by late August I couldn't remember Brown County ever looking better. And that's saying quite a bit about one of Wisconsin's greatest jewels.

A rainy spell helped. But most of the credit for the transformation belongs to Delfosse and his crew.

5) *Lawsonia*. I grew up playing the old links course and still cherish the place. But since Tom Spaulding left, it has lost some of its character. A coldness from its new employees has taken over the place like a January blizzard.

The clincher for me occurred last May when I made a reservation on a Thursday to play there that following Sunday—Father's Day—with my dad. I called Saturday to cancel because my father couldn't make it. Since I guaranteed the tee time with a credit card, an employee of the place told me they would still charge me because I didn't cancel within 48 hours of the tee time.

I popped a gasket. I wasn't told of such a rule. I was never informed in writing. But the employee refused to be flexible. Rules are rules, she said. Lawyers are lawyers, I said.

The employee said I wouldn't be charged if they sold my tee time to somebody else. Fortunately, that happened. But the coldness that employee showed me, and I heard quite a few similar stories about Lawsonia's new way of doing business, has turned me off. I love Lawsonia like no other course. But I doubt if I'll ever go back there. And that saddens me.

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6) *Pete Reif*. Few golf pros were more important to a course than Pete Reif at The Springs. Yet, as of last spring, Reif was unemployed. Those managing the course decided to make a change for change's sake. Bad move.

The Springs has always operated on a shoestring, but it overcame the trauma associated with that because of Reif. He is the antithesis of those new Lawsonia employees. Always caring, always friendly, Reif was a major reason why golfers kept coming back to the place that had a mobile home for a clubhouse.

The mobile home has been replaced by a beautiful clubhouse as The Springs is trying to have a first-class look. You can build all the beautiful buildings you want, but they'll never be anything special if the people don't operate them in a first-class manner.

That old mobile home pro shop was more of a first-class operation with Reif running it than any of those new buildings will be without him. I hope the new owner hires him back.

7) *Whoops*. Following my wonderful round at Crystal Downs, I drove up the Michigan shoreline with my buddy, John Berman, to Traverse City to check out the Grand Traverse Resort. After spending 15 minutes there we decided to head south toward Grand Rapids, where we were supposed to play the following day.

I checked the map and then pulled out across a busy, four-lane highway. I didn't see a white Taurus station wagon barreling toward my Toyota Celica. Before the driver could barely touch her brakes she plowed into my door.

As a precaution I was taken to a Traverse City hospital. My buddy John and the four people in the other car weren't badly hurt, either. That was amazing since the collision occurred when the other car was traveling around 50 mph.

Strapped to a stretcher inside the ambulance, my first thought was, "They weren't kidding when they said seat belts save lives."

My second thought was, "I hope my clubs are OK."

My third thought was, "Gee, I'm glad I did this after I played Crystal Downs."

8) *A refreshing outlook*. It was a beautiful, late-summer day when my buddy, Scott Schwendeman and I were teamed on the back 9 at Odana Hills with two gentlemen, both of whom are over 70 years old. One of them had been pronounced dead-on-

arrival at a local hospital a few months earlier after an aneurysm reached his aorta. The miracles of medicine saved him, however, and on the day he played with me he shot a 3-under par 33. His friend shot a 35.

Throughout the round they were laughing and telling stories, enjoying every minute of it. They had already walked 18 holes and were thinking

about walking 9 more.

The man who had nearly died a few months later and, according to his friend, was still not entirely out of the woods, pulled me aside one time and explained why he was so happy.

He said, quite simply, "Forget I'm playing well, life is too short not to enjoy a beautiful day like this."

Amen. 🙏

Editorial



HUGO and ROSSI— *They're Both Right On This One*

By Monroe S. Miller

Frank Rossi's trip to our fall business meeting was a good idea. He met some more of our members, had an opportunity to discuss his vision of the turfgrass management program at Wisconsin for the next couple of years, and presented an outline of a number of research projects he has in mind.

He also came up with a good idea. After listening to conversation about how to improve attendance at the autumn business meeting, he stood up and basically asked, "why don't you hold this meeting immediately after the Symposium?"

Sometimes it takes an outsider to come up with the obvious.

The arguments in favor of such an idea are persuasive. It would eliminate a trip for most of us, a trip that comes when time is precious and we are busy getting Wisconsin golf courses ready for winter.

The Symposium is a huge draw. It is difficult to imagine most WGCSA members wouldn't stay around for another hour to attend the meeting.

This new idea of Rossi's eliminates a lot of planning on the part of the board—no additional arrangements for a meeting room or meals would have to be made.

And I've got to believe that our busi-

ness meeting attendance would be greater this way, even if some members did not stay for it. That's the whole idea in a nutshell.

The WGCSA board has wrestled with participation problems at this meeting for as long as I have been a member. In fact, I presided over a meeting one year that had only a dozen people in the audience. It was a grim scene.

We all understand the problems with the timing. Then in some years, bad weather and attending road problems has dictated who could even get there. Rossi's idea solves that, as well.

I believe the officers and board should let Rossi's suggestion be an incitement to action. A new idea like this shouldn't be dreaded or painful—a lot of the purpose of a governing body is to make sure the best ideas have a chance to prevail.

Ideas won't keep; something needs to be done about them. My recommendation is that when the board plans the 1993 Association calendar, the fall business meeting is scheduled to convene immediately after the Symposium concludes.

Victor Hugo, nearly a century and a half ago, wrote about "an idea whose time has come." I think Professor Rossi's idea is one of those. 🙏

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