



The Quest For “Not Too Bad”

By Pat Norton

A quest, by my definition, is a search or a trek in search of something magical or mystical. In other seasons on Wisconsin's golf courses, the quest is for perfection. We are all continually striving for perfect playing conditions for our golfers. When we do have a golf course that nears perfection, it is indeed a magical, mystical sight.

The trouble is, gentlemen, that perfect playing conditions are damn near impossible to continually provide! Take this fall, for example. My quest has certainly not been for “perfection”. In this autumn season of scarce help, wet weather, and dark and frosty mornings, my quest is for “not too bad”.

The quest for “not too bad” includes a daily diet of morning chores (with the same three or four people), basic mowing only, no extra projects please, and the repeated weekend scramble of conditioning the course to some semblance of its summer peak.

The quest also includes doing the work of 12 men with a staff of five, trying desperately to finish greens aerification (when you know damn well that you should have finished long ago), or even listening patiently to a request from some member about the need for additional divot mix boxes for the ladies tees! Oh, please!

The quest is also about one man operating four different machines in a day, or wishing that one guy could operate four different machines simultaneously! Or how about giving an employee four different consecutive jobs that are all considered “morning chores”? The result is that cups get changed in the afternoons, while sand bunkers get raked about twice a week—if we are lucky.

The “not too bad” attitude is one of seeing how much work can be produced with a pint-sized crew. The end result is that all autumn long we're faced with a golf course that's not toooooo bad!

I'm sitting here writing this out near our 12th green at 2:15 p.m. The fairways are almost dry enough to mow now—the sun hasn't really shone for days. When I finish this thought I'll go get Justin started on fairway mowing—after I pull him off of the rotary mower. Not enough grass out there in late September to keep a rotary mower going all day long, don't you know? Keeping my fingers crossed, I'm soon hoping that our fairways will soon look “not too bad”.

Hey, now the sun's really breaking through! Not too bad, eh? Greens are looking better than they have in weeks—not too bad! That old fella's chip shot to within six feet? Not too bad! That new waitress in the clubhouse? Not too bad at all!

Gary, our assistant golf course superintendent, and Herb Sr. screwed up the last load of fairway fertilizer after I had to leave the property yesterday. That's bad. That's real bad! Sometimes my “not too bad” attitude gets away from me and I get upset. The “not too bad” philosophy allows only for labor shortages and poor weather—things beyond our control. There's no room for people not listening and following instructions. “It's this fertilizer pile back here, Herb, which has an analysis of 22—0—22, not this front pile with its 8—4—28 analysis. Got it?” Seven bags of the wrong fertilizer got used, which is “not too bad”, though...

Gee, golly, look at all of that muddy golf car damage that happened on our juicy golf course yesterday during the outing. Their golf cars did make some damage, but it's “not too bad” when considering the revenue generated from the golf cars and the outings. And surely we'll be out there the very next day filling in those ruts and repairing those worn areas, as the ignorant types always suggest! Not—not time for that!

I rejoice these days when we do get up to eight people out on the course,

manicuring this meadow so it'll be “not too bad”. Hey, here come a few more recruits and reinforcements! A free-thinking superintendent should surely just ask them as they drive in, “which idle mower would you like to mount up on, Tex? You have a choice of about six different mowing jobs that await you. Maybe if you really hurry, all six jobs can be completed before dark, OK?”

I really feel bad for those older golfers in the fall. The rough, especially along the fairway edge, is so green, so thick, so long! I watch with some pity as they try to blast out of the jungle and oftentimes think, “not too bad”. That shot must have gone at least 50 yards. I guess there's no need to cut there for the next week—it's getting too easy out here!

The quest for “not too bad” does work well in the fall of the year. During the other seasons it just doesn't measure up, I've found. During the autumn we have an excuse—we're just trying to hold it all together until the end of the season. Springtime finds us in somewhat the same position, although it only last for four to six weeks, not the 10 to 12 weeks as in the fall.

And in the springtime the attitude is “go get 'em, Tiger” instead of “not too bad”. We have employees who begin showing up in February wanting to know when they can start working, whereas in the fall we have reluctant employees who want to leave on weekends right after those “morning chores”—football games, bowhunting, studying and other jobs all await our formerly very dedicated staff members.

The quest for “not too bad” works temporarily for many superintendents, mainly out of necessity. A permanent mindset of “not too bad” can lead to trouble, even to unemployment. Then my quest would change from “not too bad” to “looking for employment”! 🙄