



OPENING DAY

By Monroe S. Miller

Despite what has been a relatively mild and abbreviated winter all across Wisconsin, I am ready for it to end. Yes, I have enjoyed the normality winters bring to my life. But when March arrives, so does my longing for opening day. I doubt I am much different from nearly all golf course superintendents in that regard.

Who among us isn't tired of gray days—did the sun shine at all in January until the very last week? Who isn't weary of the dreary look of dirty snow, no snow, dirty vehicles and cold feet? And I would like to meet the guy or gal who prefers (after ample rest) the bleached out look of a dormant golf course to the beauty of a green one.

Change. Maybe that is the best thing about managing a golf course in Wisconsin. About the time you are sick of one season and all it brings, a new one looms on the calendar. And at that time of transition, the upcoming season is **always** your favorite! Right now, I am dying for a warm spring day and the colorful sight of players on our golf course.

We've got emotional companionship this time of year. Walk into the golf shop at your course when the day is bright, the snow is melting and the temperature is warm in March. There they are—golfers—visiting with the golf pro and with each other, handling clubs, checking out what's new, trying on shirts and shoes. And they are a happy lot! Good spirits reign and everyone—**everyone**—wants to know "when do you think you will open?" The answer, of course and always, is—"ask God and let me know what He says!"

We never actually close our golf course until the snow begins to melt in March. Then the signs go up: GOLF COURSE CLOSED BY ORDER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS. The reason we close is to remove the temptation from these overly anxious people who cannot wait to hear the click of a golf club against a bright new Tittlist golf ball. Men who live disciplined lives all year and who always follow the rules fall prey to some overwhelming desire to sneak out and "hit a few." Trips to the local driving range or even a golf excursion to Florida or Arizona don't seem to help. They aren't the same as golf at their home course.

I understand what the man who is standing on the cart path between our clubhouse and the tenth tee is feeling. He's soaking in the view, less of the ice that may still cover Lake Mendota and more the patches of green grass and the very fat buds on trees he is close to. The sun feels really good to him, too. He is usually walking slowly, jingling the change in his pocket and daydreaming about opening day with hope it isn't too far off.

It seems at this time of year all of us are asked "when do we normally open the golf course?" In anticipation of such queries in 1994, I listed opening dates for the previous 21 years for our course in the March issue of our club publication. One of our members, an emeritus professor in the

medical school, took it one step further for the colleagues in his foursome. He shared it with me, and because I found it interesting, here it is for your edification.

I provided dates. He calculated what day in the year each was. From this he calculated the average and the standard deviation. He took that data, plotted it on a graph with *day of year* on one axis and *year* on the other and produced a neat graphic that illustrates opening day variability. Below are the data:

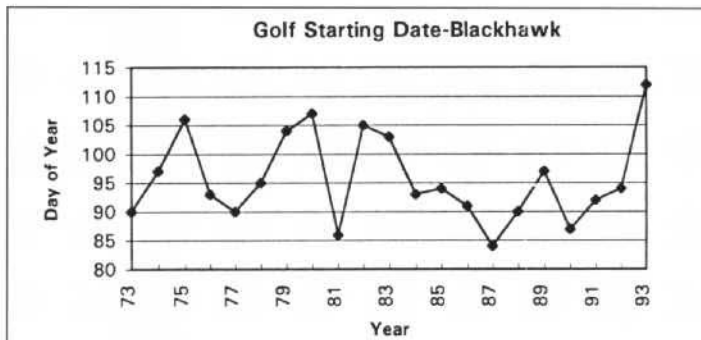
YEAR	DATE OPENED	DAY IN YEAR
1973	31 March	90
1974	7 April	97
1975	16 April	106
1976	3 April	93
1977	31 March	90
1978	5 April	95
1979	14 April	104
1980	17 April	107
1981	26 March	86
1982	15 April	105
1983	13 April	103
1984	3 April	93
1985	4 April	94
1986	1 April	91
1987	25 March	84
1988	31 March	90
1989	7 April	97
1990	28 March	87
1991	2 April	92
1992	4 April	94
1993	22 April	112
AVERAGE		96
STANDARD DEVIATION		8

For those who are curious, the average (or mean) is just that—add all the day assignments up and divide by 21. The answer is 96. Next, find the difference between 96 and each year's assigned day number; some will be + values and some will be - values. It doesn't matter. Square these numbers and summate them. Divide the sum by $n - 1$ (20). The square root of the answer is the standard deviation. Or you could, as Professor Kussow suggested as an alternative, hit the standard deviation pad on your calculator!

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The data shows that on the average our golf course opens on April 6th, the 96th day of the year. Approximately two thirds of the time the starting date has been between March 29th and April 14th (April 6th plus 8 days and April 6th minus 8 days). Last year we opened on April 1st, well within the standard deviation. It works! Below is the graph of the opening day data for our course.



Can you doubt the men in this foursome get excited about opening day?

When you get right down to it, opening day is really about the sheer joy of anticipation. Or at least it is for me. Anticipation is the same reason people like me love Halloween and Thanksgiving and Christmas. We like the first mowing and golf tournaments. Anticipation is the fun of expecting what could be.

Once in a while, about one year in seven on my Wisconsin golf course, winter injury dampens that joy of the first day. But in March, why worry about what may not happen? It's like the story Winston Churchill told about an old man on his deathbed who said that he had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which never happened!

Looking forward to nothing but trouble, long days, grass problems, player complaints and all that is negative is the antithesis of an optimistic and happy anticipation, whether of opening day or anything else.

Attitude is everything. Is the glass half empty or is it half full? Count me among those who see it half full. Surely you cannot go around your golf course all year with an irrepressible optimism, seeing good in everything. That is pretty tough to do at 2 a.m. in August when there are pump station problems. But there is even less value in spending every working moment as a gloomy old curmudgeon, seeing the dark side of absolutely everything. It is generally true that life and work are as much fun and as rewarding as your attitude makes them.

This is also the time of year when those who haven't lost that joy of anticipation say "this could be my best year ever on the golf course."

The new flag sticks and bright flags, the newly painted tee blocks and ballwashers, and the freshly cut grass of opening day are not unlike the presents under the Christmas tree. I still can hardly wait to open those gifts. In the same way when the course is dressed for the first time of the year, I can hardly wait to see the first foursome playing down the first fairway. It is sheer happiness.

It may be a fleeting emotion as reality sets in with the first of the ever present and never ending problems of managing a golf course. The rush from that anticipation can however, with the right attitude, last until the next special event. Who knows—that special event could be a beautiful sunrise tomorrow morning. 🌅

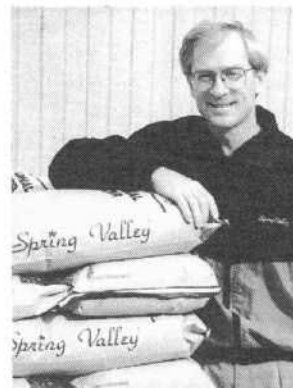
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