



GOLF COURSE OLYMPICS

By Monroe S. Miller

We decided to have a little lunch at a relatively new spot on the other side of town—Planet Golf.

I'd already been there several times. It is a unique place, a combination of a restaurant, an antique store full of golf collectibles, a bookshop with a generous stock—old, used and new—of golf books and publications, and a well stocked golf shop. Planet Golf also had an indoor practice area, complete with VCRs and private lessons. Enormous big screen TVs showed golf all day long, and golf crazed kids and players could play golf videos and games as long as their money held out. Original art, prints and posters covered the walls and were available for purchase. There were toys for sale, and at the entrance you were greeted with a restored, brightly painted (red) Harley Davidson golf cart. It turned on a large lazy susan. Elsewhere were several customized golf cars, looking more like small versions of expensive automobiles.

On the surface you would think Planet Golf had little chance for success. Golf is popular, but it isn't like car racing, rock n' roll music or outdoor hobbies like hunting. But I never doubted it would succeed. I know our town too well. There are too many people head over heels in love with golf for it to fail. It had something for everybody, even golf course superintendents.

Since Planet Golf had opened I had enjoyed several meals there, but more importantly had added some great books to my golf library and bought some fabulous golf course toys for my toy collection. For example, for six bucks I purchased *The Bobby Jones Story* by O.B. Keeler and Grantland Rice—a first edition. Less than two weeks after that, a copy of H.W. Wind's *Following Through* showed up for sale—for \$3! Musser's *Turf Management* and Madison's *Principles of Turfgrass Culture* both

were on the Planet Golf bookshelves before they found a home on mine.

But the purchase that pleased me most was a mint Tonka Golf Course Tractor. My mouth fell open when I saw it, in its original condition and at a fair price. I snapped it up quick and it looks super with the rest of my collection. In fact, since I'd found one for myself I was able to return Tom Morris' to him. He had given me the Tonka he'd had for years in a moment of unforgettable generosity that touched me each time I thought about it. Now we each had one, thanks to Planet Golf.

I got there a little late. Tom Morris and Bill Flagstick had secured a couple of tables and pulled them together. Bogey Calhoun was trying on a GEAR golf shirt with the Planet Golf logo on the left sleeve, and Steady Eddie Middleton was playing FORE! on a video machine. Scottie Fennimore was drinking a cherry Coke and watching Calhoun act like a kid.

"Tell those guys to get over here so we can order," Tom said, with a little irritation in his voice.

"Yes, sir," I replied, inspiring a grin from Tom when he realized he'd been a little short with me. Ed and Bogey wandered over to join us.

"What are you so grumpy about, Tom?" Bill asked our friend. We're not used to seeing this normally even tem-

pered and kindly guy in a bad mood.

"I am short of help and if I had a little more conscience I would have passed on breaking bread with you guys. We have a lot of work to do before the Western Women's tournament rolls into town and I am getting a little nervous."

A waitress came around and took our orders. It was a confirmation that this was a Wisconsin group through and through—all were red meat orders!

"I can hear the left ventricle of my heart groan," Bogey said as he grabbed his chest. "One of these years I am going to improve my diet and try to recapture my youthful figure."

"You'll never do it, Calhoun," Ed retorted. "You would have to give up beer and there is absolutely zero chance of that ever coming to pass!"

"You're right," he said with a sheepish grin.

"So, Tom, how is it that Maple Leaf CC is understaffed with a big event looming?" Bill wondered. "That isn't your style, and I don't want to hear that your budget is a little tight."

Tom sighed and started to explain. "One of my key guys was fixing a sprinkler head—it had a slow leak—and he looked up in time to have a golf ball smack him right below his left eye. We rushed him to the hospital

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and, to make a long story short, he will be out of commission for a while. We are still praying he doesn't lose the sight in that eye."

He went on. "Then, last winter, Laura and Martie asked me if they could go to the Olympics in Atlanta. They are a couple of great kids—both are on the UW women's basketball team—and they want to take advantage of a once in a lifetime opportunity. So I said 'sure, great, go for it.' It was a weak moment, but they should have my blessing to go. I wish I was going—Atlanta is only a long day's drive away. What I didn't even think about or calculate was the timing—they will be gone right during our big national tourney. It is going to hurt us and our efforts."

"You've got two choices, Morris." Bogey offered with a grin. "You can get some temp help for when the girls are gone, or you can stage your own olympics so they won't want to go to Atlanta."

Morris rolled his eyes, looked at Calhoun and said, "You are either drunk, on drugs or just plain dumb. Or you could be an idiot."

"Why?" Bogey said as he at first feigned surprise. But you could see his offbeat mind at work, see the wheels turning as a wise crack quickly evolved into a plan.

"Your course is closed on Mondays. Why not plan a big golf course olympics, not just for your crew but for

everybody in the area—our crew, Fennimore's staff, all of us. Golf courses in some part of the state have softball teams and others get together for bowling. What would be so weird if we got organized in our town for a golf course olympics?"

Bill, Steady Eddie and I perked up and started listening to Calhoun, something we don't do all that often. If you know Bogey, it takes a while to get to know when to ignore him and when he is half serious. He was sounding half serious.

Scott and Tom looked at each other, wondering (like I was) just where Calhoun was heading.

He talked on, making things up as he went along. "Each club could send a competition team to MLCC. We could start at mid-morning, on the range at Maple Leaf, and if we needed more room for the events, we could use the holes and features contiguous—or nearly so—to the range. It would work out great."

Morris quickly straightened his back and nearly stood up. "Wait a minute, Calhoun; back that rig up. Why are we having the olympics at my course? Are you trying to get me fired? I think we should have the olympics at your place."

"Geez, TM," Calhoun replied, "my employees aren't the ones headed for Atlanta."

"Oh, yeah," Tom said with a certain resignation in his voice, "I forgot."

It seemed funny that Tom was so taken in by Bogey's babbling that he acted as if Calhoun was serious!

"I can see the events now." Bogey continued. "We'll start with cup cutting, and figure the winners based on how quickly the cup is cut, placement, perpendicularity, and tidiness."

"My crew won't even show in this event." Fennimore said. It seemed like he, much like Tom, was already in the competition and rooting for his team.

"That's up to you." Bogey said. He went on. "We'll have several mowing events—greens, fairways and tees. We will judge the teams on cut quality, so you'd better bring your Joe Check prisms and course mechanic to set the reels. Pattern and speed of completion will count in the scoring, too."

Ed smiled and pitched his crew. "We'll hammer you guys in the mowing events. Don't even bother to show up. That way you won't be embarrassed or humiliated!"

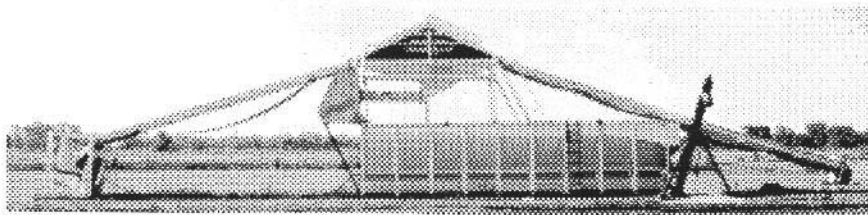
Bogey was rolling and he knew it. The food arrived but sat in front of us,
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getting cold. Nobody wanted to be bothered with eating right now; important plans were being made. Billie Flagstick hadn't said much. He finally piped up.

"We are going to have a bunker event, aren't we?" he asked with far too much seriousness in his voice.

"Absolutely," Bogey said with a big grin on his face. He had us eating out of his hand and he knew it. It was his ultimate pleasure. I always told Bogey his motto should be *Calhoun is my name, and b.s. is my game!* That was what we loved about him.

It had gone on long enough. I was hungry and the Reuben in front of me needed attention. I made my contribution to the foolishness.

"Seems to me like you are forgetting key golf course events, Bogey."

"Not possible," he said.

"Well, I've got a guy I'd like to enter in a rough mowing contest. This cat can mow for hours on end and never get off the seat—not to move a barricade or a bench or a ballwasher, pick up a branch or move a bunker rake. He gets plenty of slack in the seatbelt, sits 'way back and relaxes as the

world goes by. Nobody—NOBODY—could beat him out in this event. He is world class, a blue ribbon winner. He's the champion!"

The guys laughed. Ed picked up and told about one of his experiences. "I've got the winner for the cup cutter throwing contests. I saw an employee stand in the mid-green area last year, hoist the cup cutter shoulder high and position it like a javelin, and launch it. I very nearly had an underwear problem, I was so shocked. The damndest thing was that it landed perfectly perpendicular to the green in an excellent spot for the flag! Wouldn't that be a great event for our olympics?!"

Bill Flagstick came back. "What would a golf course olympics be without a Cushman creek jumping event? Or a Cushman bunker jump? Either could be a one-man or a two-man competition, like the bobsled race in regular winter Olympics!"

The gang was rolling now. We sat there eating and talking and having fun with what amounted to good-natured foolishness. We talked about cutting up range balls, mowing tees with transport wheels on the machine, flag and pin pitching and

others I cannot remember.

"So how do you feel now, Tom?" Bogey asked. "Are you still worried that a couple of kids are going to Atlanta for a few days and your entire operation is a disaster as a result?"

"No," he replied. "I see what you are up to, Calhoun—putting a clearer perspective on what is, I admit, kind of a small problem. Actually, I hope they have fun while they are down there."

Planet Golf was buzzing with customers—diners and shoppers and browsers. It seemed everyone was cheerful and enjoying the moment. I think even Tom Morris saw that a humorous attitude toward the passing scene at his course makes life more bearable. The ability to laugh at oneself and your circumstances once in a while might actually be the distinction between the sane and the insane. For Tom, the good thing was to get that reminder from his colleagues, who also happen to be his best friends.

What a great sport—what a game golf is. And how lucky we were, myself and my friends, to be immersed dead center in the middle of it. Today, Tom Morris couldn't have agreed with that more. ♣



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