



Wisconsin's Longest Golf Hole

By Monroe S. Miller

The idea was born on an autumn afternoon at the Sand Trap Tap, a local watering hole some of the guys would visit once in awhile. That afternoon, by chance, most of us were there for the year's first taste of Oktober Brau. As I recall, it was delicious.

The beer may have been memorable, but what I remember most was the hatching of an idea.

"I'm bored," said Bogey Calhoun as he drew a long swig from the brown Oktober Brau bottle.

"Don't misunderstand. Work isn't boring; we are too busy for that. In fact, there usually is more going on than I would really like. I could take some 'boring' at the golf course occasionally. More routine, less extra projects. And who could be bored with his family life? Not me.

"What I am bored with are our professional organizations. We are losing the excitement; our edge is getting dull. And I don't know why."

"I know what you mean," chimed in Steady Eddie Middleton. "I've got the same feeling. But I thought it was me or work or the time of year. Life is kind of slow these days."

Scott Fennimore echoed the same emotion. But Tom Morris zeroed in on the reasons. Tom was singularly wise in these kinds of golf course matters.

"Men, we need a project to work on," Tom declared. "We need a reason to live, so to speak."

The guys laughed at him, but they sort of knew what he meant.

"We were a really tight group when we were out beating the bush for money. It didn't matter if you were in Argyle or Winneconne, you knew all the state's golf course superintendents had a research farm on their minds. From passing the hat on men's day at Surveyor's Point Golf Club to squeezing the turf manufacturers for big bucks, fundraising goals kept us tied together."

Tom went on. "Then, once the research station was built and running, we raised the million dollars for our endowment. Golf tournaments, pledge programs, assessments and all that kept us headed the same way, together. Like we should be.

"When we learned that the University faculty needed a new lab, we did it for them. No state money was involved, either. We built the annex to the research farm and went even farther and opened the northern Wisconsin station. And through it all, we gave a lot of college scholarships.

"These ideas all took money and, frankly, getting the money together was fun for all of us. No one cared how much anyone raised; the idea was getting a piece of the action and

taking part in the fun. It was the common goal among us. Now, I think, some of the thrill is gone from it. We have raised money every possible way you can imagine, and I think that is why we are all a little bored."

All the guys nodded in agreement and reached for a handful of popcorn that the Sand Trap Tap provided during happy hour.

"Anybody got an idea to get us going again, pulling together in the harness?" Tom quizzed.

Silence. Finally, Kickapoo Logan spoke up. "You guys will probably think I am nuts, but here is my idea. Let's play the longest hole in the history of Wisconsin golf."

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Nobody said anything. Bogey's smile turned into a question. "What in the hell are you talking about, Kick?"

"Geez, Calhoun, let him finish. You don't have to be rude ALL the time, do you?" Tom Morris scolded.

"Sorry, Kick. Tom's right. I'll shut up until you're done. Then I'll laugh!"

Kick was a little on the quiet side and seldom said much. That is why the guys figured he really had something to offer up.

"Have any of you, by some nearly impossible chance, ever read P.G. Wodehouse's short story, The Longest Hole?"

Of course, none of the towering intellects present had. Their dumb-founded looks told Kick to continue.

"It's a great golf story, written a number of years ago by one of golf's greatest storytellers. Wodehouse's tale is about a pair of arrogant golf players. They had equal golf talent, and belonged to the same club in the same town. As you'd guess, Ralph Bingham and Arthur Jakes fell in love with the same woman — Amanda Trivett — and decided to settle her fate with a cross country golf match since they played equally at the club. The loser would leave the club and the town, and Amanda would be left for the winner to pursue without competition and eventually marry.

The one-hole match started on the first tee at the golf club in Leigh and finished in the doorway of the Majestic Hotel in Royal Square, a distance of about 16 miles!"

"Who won?" asked Bogey, who was taken in by Kick's conversation.

"Read the story and find out for yourself," was Kick's reply. "Actually, Amanda won!"

Kick went on. "When I read that story for the first time, it was almost as if I was there, so good is Wodehouse's writing.

"As I've read more and more about British and Scottish golf, similar stories crop up. As a matter of fact, cross country golf was once a craze, in the years before the countryside was as populated as it is over there these days.

"In Ireland, there was a 'Golden Ball' competition which involved teeing off the first tee at Cill Dara and putting out on the 18th at the Curragh, a distance of 8,800 yards — that's around five miles, Bogey.

There is a prize of a million pounds for a hole-in-one!"

The guys roared, and Kick Logan smiled at the interest everybody had in what he was telling.

"The first Golden Ball was won by a great Irish amateur, Joe Carr, in 52 strokes. My math tells me that averages out to 170 yards a shot. It seems even more incredible when I compare that shot average to what our club's would be — 6,500 yards divided by par 72 gives a shot length of about 90 yards. Joe must have been a great player!"

Kick had a captive audience. He took a long drink of Oktober Brau, wiped his mouth on his shirt sleeve, and went on without any encouragement from the guys. He was, as they say, on a roll.

"Two men — I think their names were Ray Thomas and Rupert Lewis — played a hole over 20 miles in length from the Radyr Golf Club near Cardiff (in Wales) to Southerndown golf club at Ewenny (near Bridgend). It was in 1920, and the strict conditions included adherence to the rules of golf. There were a lot of bets placed, most feeling that it would take over 1,000 strokes. They played

alternate strokes and completed the hole in 608 shots. It took them 16 hours."

"Hey!" Bogey Calhoun almost shouted. "We could do that and raise some money for the UW turfgrass management program!"

Bogey was proud of himself for thinking of the obvious. The guys weren't surprised.

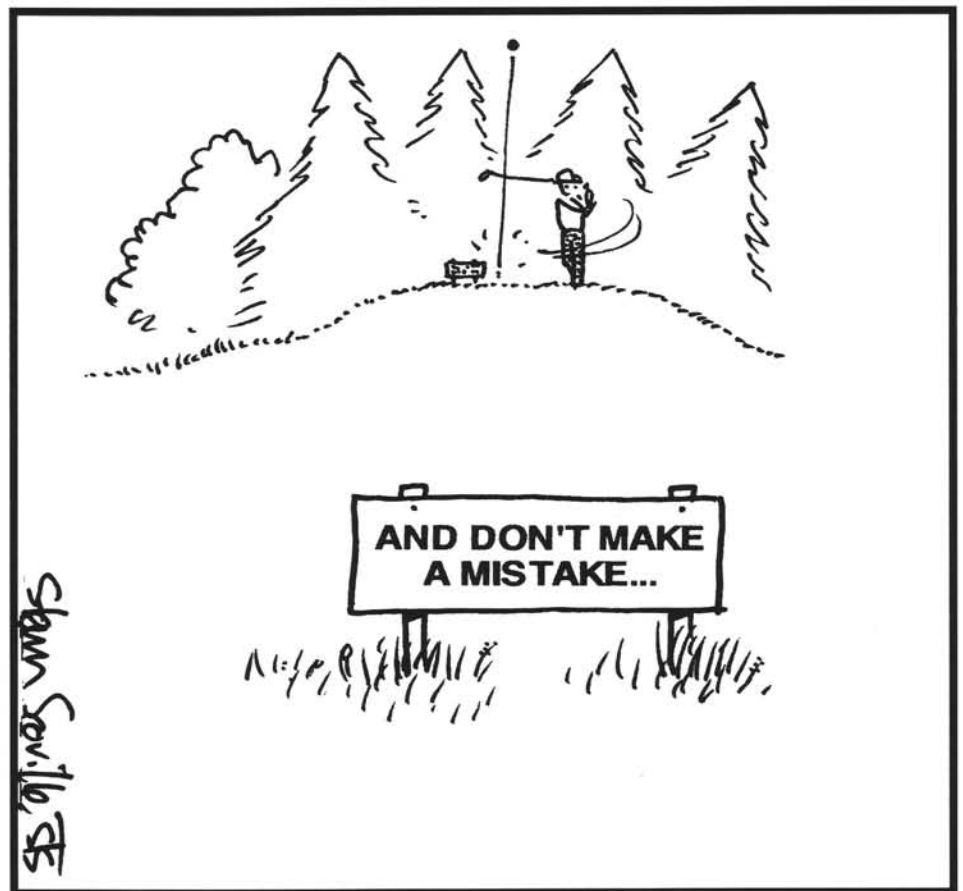
"Gosh, Calhoun," said Steady Eddie Middleton, "why do you think Kick brought this all up before us anyway? Do you think he might have thought about it as a fundraiser? And something that would be a lot of fun for everyone in our profession?"

Bogey was flushed with embarrassment, and his face turned beet red. "Sorry, Kick."

Tom Morris spoke. "So, what are you thinking, Kick?"

Kickapoo took another draw from his bottle of Oktober Brau.

"Well, I think we ought to design a long golf hole somewhere in Wisconsin. We could choose two of our WGCSA members to play the hole, and the alternate shot format seems best. I think this would be a great time of year. In late fall we are a little less busy and more of us



would be around to help. It could become golf's last gasp of the season."

Kick went on. "Much like marathon runs or a walk-a-thon, we could raise funds through pledges or from "bets" on how many strokes it would take to hole out on our longest hole. All we'd have to do is make sure whatever we finally decided on was legal."

As so often happens, great events come from pretty simple ideas hashed over in an informal setting. "The Longest Hole" became one of the highlights, not only of our WGCSA year, but of the entire world of Wisconsin golf. Over its history, tens of thousands of dollars have been brought to the University's turf-grass research program because of the event.

It took a lot of discussion to settle on a venue, but for all its history "The Longest Hole" has been played from a tee ground on one of Wayne Kussow's bentgrass plots at the Noer Research Facility to the 18th green at Billie Flagstick's golf course, Pumpkin Hollow Country Club. It has gotten so big that once the ball rolls around and into the cup on the 18th, hundreds gather in the Pumpkin Hollow clubhouse for the banquet and awards and dinner and golf talk.

It isn't just golf course superintendents who take part in the festivities. Due in a large part to Rob Schultz, the golf media around Wisconsin fell in love with the playing of The Longest Hole. At the very first playing, Schultz was there with a Capital Times photographer and his reporter's notepad. He wrote a story that was a classic and inspired much of the outside interest. These days, "The Longest Hole" is on the TV news from Appleton to Zenda.

Each year a new twist has been added. One of the first was the betting on how many golf balls would be lost. That first year was a near disaster. Even though golf course superintendents seem to never run out of golf balls, we nearly did that day. Only a quick trip to his course by Tom Morris saved the day. He returned to "The Longest Hole" with a hundred green striped range balls from Maple Leaf CC, just in time to keep the play rolling.

We learned early on we needed not only alternate shots, but we needed alternate players. The "starters" would often drop out for various reasons like sprained wrists

and ankles and old fashioned fatigue.

Marshalls were another requisite. These guys watched for traffic, checked with land owners along the hole, kept an eye open for livestock and generally kept participants and followers in line.

In Wisconsin, in fall, we also learned at the outset to dress in blaze orange. It served the needs of safety and also insured that we would not be mistaken for golf professionals. A few times the guys were mistaken for hunters, but as Bogey Calhoun said, "most of us ARE hunters!"

In its history, albeit brief, the highlights have been many. There was the first year when Kick Logan, who was a clear first choice as one of the players (since it had been his idea), hit the windshield of a farm truck. The farmer was understanding and, fortunately, we were insured. We invited him to the banquet (the farmer, that is) and he came!

The record score will stand for awhile — 1,113 shots— since it was an average of a little less than 100 yards for the six-mile golf hole.

Some of the guys think the "highlight of the highlights" was watching

city slicker Bogey Calhoun hit a ball from the middle of a fairly fresh Brown Swiss cow pie. Calhoun's snazzy saddle shoes, which looked great with his blaze orange outfit, and his pants were splattered with generous amounts of cow manure. "Now I'll stink," Bogey cried. "You've always stunk," Tom Morris responded with a straight face.

We are still not certain how we ever talked Dr. Kussow and Dr. Koval to serve as caddies one year, but they finished with energy to spare. I always said it was because they are still, at heart, farm kids. In fact, at the end of the hole, they were in better shape than the two players, both 20 years younger and both former students of the two professors!

Over hill and dale, around marshes and through the woods, across railroad tracks and along the highway, "The Longest Hole" has been a journey that grows every year. Maybe more important than the money raised for research has been the camaraderie and good will and, yes, even the sense of brotherhood it has created.

It could only happen in golf. And it has, so far, only happened in Wisconsin. 🌱

