



# *The Hardwater Golf Tournament*

By Monroe S. Miller

Sometime in January, usually either the second or third weekend of the month, quite a number of Wisconsin golf course superintendents head north.

It doesn't seem normal. Most folks in Wisconsin are scheming and planning on a way to head to warmer climes, and that includes a lot of superintendents. The exceptions, of course, are the skiers and the snowmobilers; frequently they have to travel to the colder regions to find snow to suit them. These guys find the cold weather exhilarating and refreshing; it sort of renews them and reinvigorates them for the long summer months on a golf course that lie ahead. They don't even mind the snow. It is not possible to know why they are this way. In the end, a lot of this love of cold and snow is attributed to their genes—northern European and especially Scandinavian heritage. Who really knows?

The period after the Wisconsin Turfgrass EXPO and before the national meetings is pretty dead. To liven things up, a few years ago some guys in the northern part of Wisconsin started an event that is beginning to rival The Longest Golf Hole in the world of Wisconsin golf. It isn't legendary yet, but it seems destined for that status.

The guys head for Lake Mulligan in the north central part of the state and put up in the Lake Mulligan Pine Tree Lodge for the long weekend of the tournament—golf ON Lake Mulligan. It is known far and wide as the Hardwater Golf Championship.

It is interesting that the locals have welcomed the Hardwater Tourney so openly. There is never a dispute when it comes time to lay out the course on Lake Mulligan. All of the people who have ice fishing shanties move them without question, even when one may be parked on a hot spot where the fish are

really biting. The tournament is that important to them and to the community.

"Actually," said the cynical Bogey Calhoun, "the fishermen probably don't want to have their peace, quiet and card games disrupted by golf balls banging into the shanties."

There is a permanent Hardwater Golf Tournament Committee. It is made up of superintendents in the area around Lake Mulligan. John Victor Johnson of Lake Mulligan CC is the general chairman, Carl Arndt is the course architect and builder, Fred Fredriksen handles house responsibilities, Willie Brandt chairs the play and events subcommittee, and Paul Shepherd manages awards. They are all important jobs. Of course, each man has his club or course's blessing since the tourney preparations require the use of some equipment.

Carl's job just might be the most critical. "It is for sure the most fun!" J.V. says every year. Sometime in early fall he formalizes his ideas for a hardwater course and makes a presentation to the whole committee. He's a landscape architect by training and makes a very formal presentation to the guys. Out of necessity, it is a nine-hole course. He begins with an overall drawing of all nine holes and follows with detailed drawings of each hole. He includes elevations of all features, contouring of the course, and pin placements. Designs are water colored by his wife Jill.

It isn't an easy job for Carl. He doesn't have a lot of landscape to work with! Clearly, the greens and tees have to be flat. He tries to compensate, though. Almost every year there is a bannerstone green and the three pars are nearly always narrow greens and diagonal to the direction of play.

Carl's creativity shows in two areas: his interesting routing and lay-

out of the nine holes, and his work with the surrounds.

It is no wonder he brings so much creativity to the Hardwater Tourney. He left a career in golf course design to return home and run the family golf business near Lake Mulligan.

Once J.V.'s committee approves Carl's design, Carl goes to work on implementation as soon as the week before the championship arrives. His finish grading skills are put to the test with the unusual construction medium—snow. Most years, there has been plenty of the white stuff to build the course. Committee members, using 4-wheel drive pickup trucks with snow plows and a few loader tractors, clear the fairways and stockpile the snow in areas designated by Carl.

They follow the surveyor flags which mark the line of the fairways and deposit snow at the green, tee, bunker or mound sites. They work as teams, working on opposite sides the same hole and moving to the middle. The neat piles of snow reminded one

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of piles of topsoil at a golf course construction site that were stripped with a scraper and stockpiled for use after the mass grading and finish grading were done.

The guys cleared the holes in order, and as soon as the first was done, Carl and one of the members of his staff started surveying the green and tee sites, setting grade stakes to guide them when the finish grading began. Occasionally, they weren't able to drive the metal stakes into the ice far enough to stand; Carl would merely paint the spot with water soluble paint.

He stayed close to the plows, finishing fairly close behind them. On the second day, Carl climbed aboard a Bobcat skid loader and went to work shaping the features. It was pure artistry. He quickly transformed snow piles into white, clearly definable golf course features. Some of the tees were elevated, most often the three pars. He sculpted fairway bunkers, always in landing areas for the better players in the Hardwater Championship.

But the real beauty of Carl Arndt's work was around the greens. All the greens were flat, but he gave them incredibly interesting and unique shapes. Arcs and curves were accented and even amplified by totally impressive surrounds.

"Wow!" was often heard as the competitors would see the course for the first time. The mounds were of a scale seldom seen, reminding some of the fifth green surrounds at the Augusta National Golf Club.

The bunkers were scary. Carl would shape and mound them, pack the banks hard with the Bobcat, and fill them with fluffy snow. "Four to six inches," he'd say with a laugh we all could relate to.

"Sand and snow are the same, aren't they?" Bogey Calhoun would ask.

Carl's final touch with the snow bunkers came when he sprayed the fluffy snow with diluted brown colorant, normally used in mulch beds. He had developed a recipe that almost matched the color of most Wisconsin carbonate sand. It was cool, so to speak.

If the sand was cool, then Carl Arndt's greens were nothing less than spectacular. The entire surface was evenly sprayed with water soluble, safe, organic dye—green, of course.

Then, using a ground driven Wheelie sprayer, he striped the greens, giving every other pass the second coat of dye. His crew had a system, using ropes, to mark the exact width of the stripes. When they finished a green, and it didn't take very long, you thought it was the real thing.

Tees were only sprayed once. Using trees kept after Christmas from the Village of Lake Mulligan, he "planted" woody hazards, accents and turning points in the icy landscape.

While Carl and his crew were developing and finishing the course of play, others on the committee were working on the parking lot. It was also neatly and professionally designed, despite its location on the ice of Lake Mulligan. Reserved spots for all the participants were marked, with the public and spectator parking a farther distance from the clubhouse.

Ah, the clubhouse. When the tourney first began, it was merely a large ice fishing shanty, temporarily taken over for the event. But like the tournament, the clubhouse has grown. It is a collection of several buildings connected with vestibules for these couple of days each year.

There is the main room (a dining room), a bar, a card room which also handles the overflow of diners, a coat room (it gets awfully hot inside some years) and a kitchen. Portable restrooms, which are in constant use once the beer is tapped when the last ball drops into the jar on the 9th

green, are a short way from the clubhouse proper.

The winner trophy is coveted by all who participate. It is an old Arnold Palmer golf ball centered in an acrylic block; the block is centered on top of a stainless steel pedestal. The clear plastic, of course, looks like a chunk of ice. Winner names are engraved on the pedestal.

The Hardwater Golf Tournament started as a fun event for Wisconsin golf course superintendents. Somewhere along the line it caught the interest of the local community and grew from there. The tournament now draws attention from golfers throughout the state, and the press from Minneapolis to Traverse City picked it up for stories at one time or another.

There has even been some of the ultimate form of flattery extended to the Hardwater Tourney—copy cat events. But they are, as Carl often says, "strictly amateur hour." The real thing is the ice on Lake Mulligan.

Too often, I think, for reasons of geography or population dynamics or a dozen other poor reasons, the talent and contributions of the guys "up north" are not given their fair and due recognition. In a small way, correcting those oversights may be the best and most good that comes from the Hardwater Golf Tournament.

At least once a year, they are in the limelight and they make the best of it. Even if it is cold. ♣



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