



The Winter Games

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

Noon time in a golf course shop during the height of the golf season can be a madhouse - noisy, raucous and seemingly disorganized. Usually there are too many employees for the size of the lunchroom and there are too few microwave ovens. The refrigerator is too small. The chairs and benches are crammed, dishes are everywhere until lunch is over and the mess cleaned up. People are coming and going, laughing, telling jokes, arguing about sports and sharing tall tales about drinking and dating. It is over in the blink of an eye as everyone tears off

to their afternoon assignment with the thought of quitting time motivating them. When you are my age, it is a scene right out of the movies.

In the winter, the scene couldn't be more different. The permanent staff, usually older, more mature and a lot wiser than the summer crowd, make for a more reserved and quiet lunch time.

Sometimes the atmosphere is downright serious, almost somber. For example, if you happen to visit Tom Morris' shop at the Maple Leaf CC at noon in the cold months of a Wisconsin winter, you

will hardly be noticed. All of them are readers, and in the winter they each grab the book they are reading from the bookshelf in the lunchroom and bury themselves in it after they have eaten. I have gone to Tom's shop and not one of the them, including T.M., even looked up to see who was visiting.

In Bogey Calhoun's shop, on the other hand, it is so loud you cannot carry on a conversation. Those guys are all card players. Visit their place at noon and you'll shortly find yourself in a game of sheephead or euchre or hearts.



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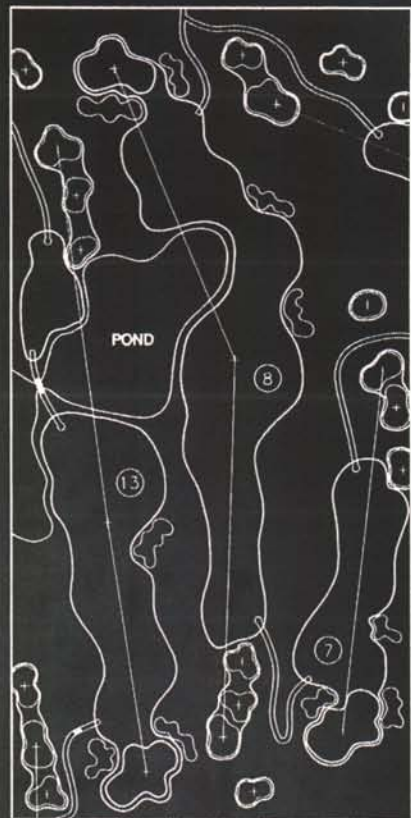
And they are serious, even if they are loud and playing only for tees or washers. By winter's end, there is a champion and his prize usually what every employee covets - an extra vacation day. Card games provide fun for the long days inside during our cold months at the Shady Dell Country Club.

The shop at the Old World Golf Club, in the winter, is more like Morris' - quiet, reserved, peaceful. You may not believe this but Oscar Bahl's crew, all over 45, are puzzlers. They don't monkey around; they are professionals and don't start on a puzzle unless it has at least 7,000 pieces. They eat their lunch at the picnic table and then move over to an oversized card table and quietly work on assembling one of those huge puzzles until lunch break is over. The puzzle they were working on when I visited early in the winter was, curiously, one of a scene of a golf

hole at St. Andrews. The pieces were extremely small and, not surprisingly, almost all green. I couldn't imagine their patience, but there they sat, with O.B. taking slow draws on his pipe, sorting through edges, trying to match colors and features while hardly a word was spoken. No radio or television either, just quiet time in a day during the quietest time of the year on a golf course in Wisconsin.

The group at Steady Eddie Middleton's was sort of a cross between O.B.'s shop and Calhoun's: they played cribbage. Well, modified cribbage. They kept running tallies of everyone's score, switched opponents daily and played from big homemade (years ago!) cribbage boards. Tees were used as pegs and each guy had his winter-long color. Scores were kept on the big blackboard in the shop. In early December a couple of the staff already had scores over 1,000

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points. The winner received a \$100 gift certificate from Farm & Fleet, courtesy of the losers. It is easy to tell that noon hours are fun times at Brezzy Hill CC.

Scottie Fennimore's crew seems never to be involved in any winter games, exactly, although to a man they enjoyed the same thing while relaxing and eating lunch. There are two TVs in the lunch room and they are tuned to soap operas. We always pour the ridicule on them every chance we have. But it is to no avail. They are glued, during the winter at least, on the screwed up lives of fictional beautiful people on the soaps at midday! Try as many of us have, we cannot shame them out of this, ah, somewhat unmasculine habit. We have serious doubts about the crew at Mt. Hope CC and often tell them, "you are beyond all hope!"

Our shop starts winter games once we know we are inside for the duration of the winter months. We have been into trivial pursuit for years. We have boxes and boxes of questions and take turns each lunch break asking those questions - one card per man per day. We have our own rules - minimal time allowed for answers and a grand total of points at the end of winter. It really isn't very fair - you need some history (read that as "age") to answer many of the questions. It leaves the younger crew members frustrated and tempts them to cheat. But even the cheating is easy to detect - a man who doesn't know the state capital of Illinois is not likely to be able to name the two former presidents from Vermont!

If there is a shop that is literally a treat to visit in the winter, it is Sanford Grant's. They are hunters and fishers and during the winter months they take turns each lunch period in preparing a major meal at noon. At the mid-morning break you may well see one of them peeling potatoes and carrots to put

around a venison roast they will feast on at dinner (which is what most people call the noon meal; the evening meal is supper). Around 11:00 a.m. it gets difficult to work, I would imagine, as the most delicious aromas waft through the lunch room, kitchen

and shop. Or, I've been at Mendota Bay CC when they were getting a big wild turkey ready for the Weber grill in time for dinner. The ice fishermen on the staff were set up on Lake Mendota and if the pan fish were hitting, you knew that in a day or two those fish would be in



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the deep frier at mid-day. I have eaten there when they were having a Friday fish fry; it was better than eating candy! Fresh fish, cole slaw (home made by a spouse), warm bread and real salted butter - wow! They may not be gourmet chefs, but they prepare solid, hot,

well-cooked chow that is perfect feed for hard working men during a cold Wisconsin winter.

Winter is what you make it. Heck, I'll bet half the world doesn't even know what real winter or snow is; that is not true for the more universal summer. As I have

traveled about Wisconsin in the winter and visited so many golf course maintenance facilities, what I have seen is that these days of winter are times of contentment. A golf course shop can be a cozy institution in the dead of winter. There is important work to do, make no mistake. But it is work best done at a normal pace and in regular hours. The personalities involved need a slower time in the year to recharge their enthusiasm, to reflect on the season past and the lessons learned from it that will lead to a better season next year. It is a time for planning, though for some that is an informal process. And it is a season of relaxation, a compensation we all have earned during the other months of the year.

However, when the GCSAA conference is over, when the days are perceptibly longer and there is early talk of golf in the club house, excitement rises. The scores from the winter games are tallied, they are put away for another winter, and staff start bring cold lunches again. Soon, always before you know it, there will be green grass.

Then the REAL fun begins! ♣

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