



# The Great Wisconsin Mowing Marathon

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

"You're crazy!" Bogey Calhoun said as he shook his head in disbelief, which was a little like the pot calling the kettle black.

"Worse," Steady Eddie Middleton chimed in. "It proves you're simple."

"Yeah, but will you guys back me on this or not?" Harry Oxford wanted to know.

"Count me in!" Tom Morris responded immediately. "I think you have come up with a cool idea."

"Me, too," I said. "Ignore Calhoun and Middleton. You will have more support from our colleagues than you will know what to do with. Those two duds will only get under foot."

"No, no," they protested now, almost in unison. "We want to be involved, too."

"We'll think about it," Tom said. "You may have missed your chance."

What Ox had bounced off his buddies was a bold plan he had to raise some money for the Boy Scouts of America. "This wonderful organization, which did so much for me and millions of others in youth, is suffering unfair criticism, despite the fact that the Supreme Court sided with them. I am going to try to show my respect and gratitude by raising some dough for their new building in town. And the fundraiser I have in mind is the mowing

marathon that Calhoun and Middleton thought was so funny."

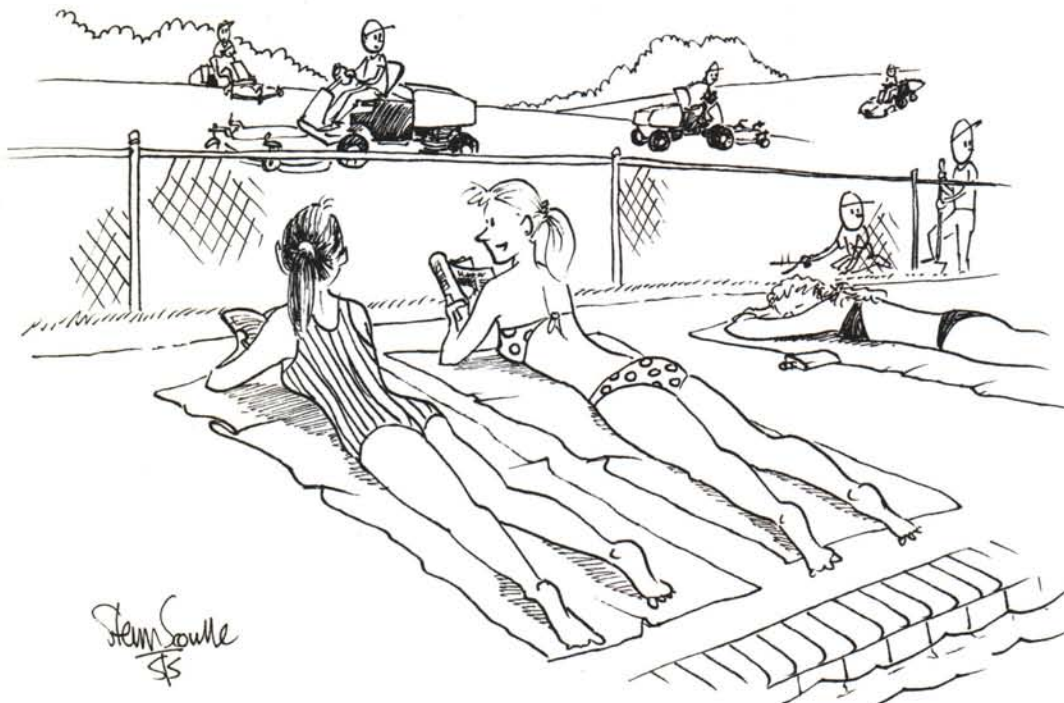
Ox hesitated until Tom said, "Keep going."

"Well, the Guinness Book of Records has records for all kinds of goofy things – the most continuous hours for a DJ to broadcast on the radio with no sleep, the longest continuous kiss, the most people jammed into a phone booth or a Volkswagon. I want the record for the most continuous hours of mowing with a triplex greensmower. I want to be the marathon mowing champ!"

"Where are you proposing to do this, Ox?" Bogey wondered.

"Right here at Serenity Bay CC."

"I THINK ITS GREAT HOW THEY TAKE SUCH GOOD CARE OF THIS PART OF THE COURSE."



Why would I want to set the mowing marathon record anywhere else?" Harry answered with some obvious irritation.

"Well, it seems to me like you are going to mow the stink out of your greens," Steady Eddie offered.

"Who says you have to mow greens?" Ox said. "Here is what I want to do – crosscut fairways. I would use triplex greensmowers to do the mowing."

Nobody said anything, a hint that Ox was making some sense.

"I think I'll need a committee to launch this thing, a committee of local people who will help with pledges and some members like you guys who can help with the technical end of it. I will need a PR person and I was thinking the major manufacturers would each loan a mower with lights.

"I know the Club members will

help – not much goes on up here – and I know the Scouts will be fantastic to work with."

Calhoun wanted to know what Ox was going to do when nature called. "I've read about the protocol for other record breaking events and we may use something like a 15 minute bathroom break every eight hours. I can eat and drink while I am operating the mower."

"One thing in favor of Serenity Bay is that the fairways are mostly flat. You shouldn't run any risk of a tipover," Tom observed.

"I will have to be careful of hitting trees on each turn - the fairways may be flat but they are tree-lined," Harry noted.

"If we are in a dry spell, dodging sprinkler heads will keep you wide awake at night," Steady Eddie laughed.

"Don't worry," Ox answered him,

"there won't be water going on any fairway I am mowing in the middle of the night!"

Tom wondered how long Harry thought he could stay wide awake enough to operate a triplex greens-mower.

"I'd guess, based on my experience at having to stay awake in the Army, that 72 hours wouldn't be an unrealistic goal."

Then we ALL laughed, knowing not one of us would manage a meager 24 hour stint.

"Well," Tom drawled, "you'll never know unless you try."

Harry Oxford's genuine, generous personality carried his dream forward. The Club made their facilities available for the marathon. The public would be welcome to use restrooms, view the mowing attempt and park in the lot. Members teamed up and worked

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shifts, one person on each side of the fairway. They were there when Ox turned to make the return pass, insuring his safety and eliminating any risk of an accident.

Our Wisconsin distributors were great. Ox had a Toro, a Jacobsen and a John Deere triplex to use, all with headlights. They were set a 1/2" height of cut, but the baskets were left off. Superintendents and equipment managers from all over Wisconsin volunteered; it seems almost everyone wants to be part of such an original historic event. They helped on the course and in the shop. As Ox mowed his way down each fairway that night toward the green, a backup machine was there, ready to go. We didn't want a potential record washed out because of a machine failure. The plan was to switch machines each four hours, about the time a full tank of fuel would last. The machine that was under use had the fluids checked and a reel-to-bedknife adjustment made. It was fueled for its next shift.

As the time for the mowing marathon grew nearer, the pledges were pouring in from all over Wisconsin and around the country. Ox became a bit of a celebrity, even earning an interview on the Golf Channel. He was getting nervous from all the attention. "All I want to do is mow for the Scouts," was his heartfelt observation.

And mow he did. He was with a lot of people the entire time of the marathon. He spent a bit of each bathroom break every eight hours - 15 minutes - grabbing a catnap. He was wide-eyed, alert and good natured through about 60 hours.

Then it got tough. He didn't exactly hit a wall, but he started to fade fast. I was there and it seemed obvious to me he wasn't going to make his 72 hours. Until it started to rain.

It rained hard, and the rain was cold as if it had come down from the Arctic Circle. I was shivering

and my teeth rattled. And as I watched Ox, he smiled and smiled and gave me a thumbs up. The cold and miserable wet gave him a slap out of his drowsiness. We knew he had a chance at the 72 hours.

Members of Serenity Bay were proud as punch of their golf course superintendent. The Scouts were serving treats to all the team members, guests, citizens from town and out-of-towners, and anybody else who had shown up to see the mowing marathon.

In the end, he made 72 hours. By then he had quite an audience and

he had raised over \$20,000 for the local BSA troop and their building fund. It was an old fashioned scene, with cheering and happiness all around. Political correctness was out the window, and the scouting experience for the local kids was going to be better than ever.

And Harry Oxford - the Ox - had the world record for a mowing marathon.

"Wait until next year," he said as he rode off in a Cushman with his wife and kids for a good night's sleep. "Now I have a record to break!"

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