



Winter Disasters

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

It was surprising to have to search for a parking place at the Stockyard Inn in March in the middle of the day. A guy figures the rest of the world moves at his pace and for golf course superintendents in Wisconsin, March is decidedly slower than most other months. This was my first stop at the Stockyards although I had certainly read about their good food, generous portions and reasonable prices. Obviously, that is why the place was busy.

I was the last to arrive. Bogey Calhoun, Steady Eddie Middleton, Tom Morris and Scottie Fennimore were already jabbering away at a table when I walked in.

The restaurant smelled good; there is nothing like the aroma of beef on a hot grill. I was hungry for a good well-done steak, a baked potato smothered with butter and a side dish of cooked carrots. That's an all-American meal that makes a man healthy!

The guys had ordered and were already heavy into conversation about – what else? – golf courses. “Get me up to speed,” I begged. “I don't want to feel left out.”

“Oh, Calhoun was just filling us in on his latest disaster at the course,” Tom said with a grin. “He can't even run a smooth operation in the winter.”

“Hey, be nice, Old Man,” Bogey said to Tom with an even bigger grin on his face.

“Details, please!” I asked.

“Oh, it wasn't that big of a deal,” Bogey said to me. “How were we supposed to know we would have such a warm spell in late February?”

“OK, what happened?” I asked.

“Well, we sneaked a small ice fishing shack out to the pond on the north end of our course, figuring we'd harvest a few of the pan fish we knew were in it. Our big irrigation pumps pull a few fish through the filters but we knew that there were still some good-sized tasty ones in the water. We can't fish for them in the summer, so winter seemed to be the perfect time.”

“Go on,” I encouraged.

“Do I have to draw you a picture? During that warm spell my shanty sunk. And we had all our fishing equipment in it.”

I laughed like crazy. So did the other guys, including Bogey.

“Do you have it out of the pond yet?” I asked between laughing jags.

“Yeah. And it was damned difficult. We couldn't wait too long out of fear some members would catch us, or that the pond would refreeze and we'd have to cut a big hole in the ice to get it out. So we had a small crane come out to the

course. The ground was soft enough that we had to plank the machine to the pond. And we had to hire a diver to cable the shack so the crane could lift it out of the water.”

We all were in stitches over the luck only Calhoun could conjure. “Where is it now?” Tom asked.

“Up north at my father-in-law's cabin, where the ice is thick,” he replied. “I'll never do that again. And we didn't catch many fish, either, not enough for a fish fry in the shop for the crew.”

“Don't we have enough problems during the golf season without practically asking for trouble now?” Tom asked Bogey.

“I said I would not do that again, ever. It almost ruined my winter.”

Our food arrived and we started eating. As Eddie was buttering his roll, he picked up the conversation.

“Well, Bogey,” he started slowly, “we had a disaster this winter, too. I may as well tell you about it, just in case you hear about it from someone else.”

“What happened?” Bogey asked with obvious relief in his tone.

“You guys have all seen our \$100,000 shelter house, haven't you?”

We all nodded in the affirmative. “It's nicer than the house I live in,” Calhoun joked.

Ed continued. “There were a couple of trees we needed to remove and winter is perfect because no one is around. We got the first one on the ground with no trouble. It was cold, everybody was working hard and in no time the wood was cut to length and loaded onto the dump truck. The small limbs and branches were chipped, and the area was raked clean.

“We took a break, filled up the big chain saw with fuel, and went to work on the second tree. It notched easily and I started the cut through the trunk. The saw started to spit out black sawdust, indicating some rotting in the heartwood. All of a sudden the damn tree started to fall, only not where I had intended when I notched it. In the blink of an eye it neatly dropped on the roof of the shelter, crushing it and coming to rest on the concrete block wall. I nearly had a coronary.”

No laughter on this one, until Calhoun started to snicker. “At least nobody got hurt, right?” He grinned.

The rest of us were sympathetic. I asked whom he called first.

“The insurance carrier first. The green committee chair next. Within an hour, the president, the chairman and a couple of board members were on the scene. I

wanted to disappear."

"I hope you took it like a man!" Calhoun said before he nearly rolled out of his chair. We all started to laugh, too, and so did Eddie.

"Nothing is supposed to happen in the winter," he said. "I still cannot believe it."

"Do you have the building reroofed?" Calhoun asked as he caught his breath. Ed wasn't amused now.

"Since we are confessing our sins," Scottie started, "I may as well make everybody feel good. My story is more embarrassing than disastrous.

"I took the guys from my crew out to lunch on a Friday, not long after Christmas. We chose the Paradise Café on the west side of town. It's a pretty nice place with good food and a variable menu. The place appeals to neckties and blue collars alike. We felt right at home.

"We were seated at a round table and the waitress brought the menus, along with water and a big basket of hard rolls. While we were looking at the menu and deciding what to order, Joe reached over and took a roll. Before I could pass him the butter he fired it and hit a guy at another table in the back of the head!

"The victim spun around quickly to see who had done the deed. I nearly had an accident when I saw it was a member of our club."

"Joe merely said, 'Sorry, I thought you were somebody else,' and continued to look the menu over. He didn't realize it was one of our players."

"I looked right at Joe and scolded, 'You're a jerk,' and went over to apologize. He was pretty nice about it, nicer than I would have been. All I could think of, besides of subjecting Joe to a slow death, was how could an incident like this happen in the winter?"

Tom was chuckling and asked if we had heard about Taddy Withington and how he had gotten a truckster up in the air with his hoist, only to have it tip off. We hadn't, and then I wondered why we were laughing at such bad luck.

Tom then 'fessed up that he had his 4-wheel pickup in front of the clubhouse this past January. It was icy, he started to slide, and the only thing that stopped him from sliding down the first fairway was bumping up against a tree. "It took a wrecker with a winch to pull me back to safety," he said, "and almost a grand at the body shop to pull out the dent in the box."

"My pride was hurt more than my truck," he continued, "and the card players in the 19th hole have had a field day teasing me about it."

We took a breather to use the bathroom and to get refills all around.

"Come on," Tom said to me as we returned to sit for a few more minutes. "I know darn well you aren't immune to these disasters. You can't be. In fact, you are probably more susceptible than the rest of us."

I took a sip of the hot coffee that the waitress had just poured, sat back and smiled.

"You'll never know, Tom, you'll never know. I'm enjoying a nice quiet event-free winter, like we all should be." Don't I wish! ♡

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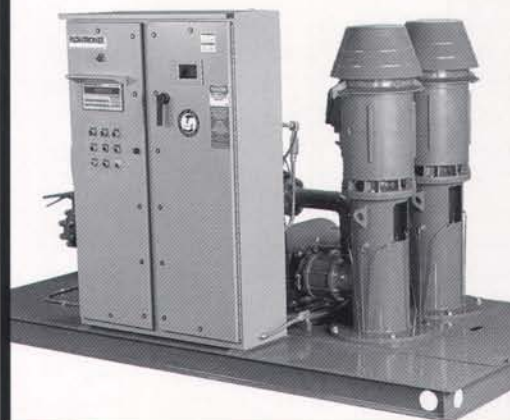
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