

As Winter Closes, Wisconsin Golf Courses Get Ready to Open

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

It seems to happen every year - once I get back from the GCSAA conference my mind shifts out of the winter mode and thoughts turn to getting ready for opening. Winter ice and snow trapped us in southern Illinois on the way home from Atlanta, but the lengthening days and slowly warming temps confirm that the sun is moving north. Spring and golf will be here soon.

This is an exciting and emotional time of the year, if...we don't have any winter injury. In some ways the brutal cold days with no snow cover that came at the end of January and in early February were what some of us wanted - nature's way of reducing populations of some insect pests whose numbers have grown to dangerous levels during the recent mild winters.

Soon enough the blossoms of the spring bulbs will be pushing up, in some cases even through the snow. Then we will know that golf season is at hand.

We have come to more or less expect big things from the University of Wisconsin - Madison sports teams. Bo Ryan has followed nicely in Dick Bennett's footsteps and given us some extremely competitive basketball games. Barry Alvarez has fielded some awesome football teams in his years here - three Rose Bowl Championships in ten years, for example.

In that fine tradition, the UW - Madison Department of Meteorology has been fielding winning teams in the weather forecasting competition started 20 years ago. Run by Penn State, the forecasters come from 37 colleges and universities to compete.

Competitors must submit forecasts of high and low temps and predict precipitation amounts during a 24-hour period for 13 cities.

Scoring is similar to golf. The more degrees off from the actual temperatures, the more points that get added to the competitor's score. The lowest score wins first.

There are four divisions of competition, and the UW

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WISCONSIN TEMPERATURE CONVERSION CHART

70 and above	Texans turn on the heat and unpack the thermal underwear. People in Wisconsin go swimming.	10 below	Californians fly away to Mexico. People in Wisconsin get out their winter coats.
60 and above	North Carolinians try to turn on the heat. People in Wisconsin plant gardens.	20 below	Hollywood disintegrates. The Girl Scouts in Wisconsin are selling cookies door to door.
50 and above	Californians shiver uncontrollably. People in Wisconsin sunbathe.	30 below	Polar bears begin to evacuate the Artic. Wisconsin Boy Scouts postpone "Winter Survival" classes until it gets cold enough.
40 and above	Italian and English cars won't start. People in Wisconsin drive with the windows down.	40 below	Mt. St. Helens freezes. People in Wisconsin rent some videos.
32 and above	Distilled water freezes. Lake Michigan's water gets thicker.	60 below	Santa Claus abandons the North Pole. Wisconsinites get frustrated because they can't thaw the keg.
20 and above	Floridians don coats, thermal underwear, gloves, and woolly hats. People in Wisconsin throw on a flannel shirt.	100 below	Microbial life no longer survives on dairy products. Cows in Wisconsin complain about farmers with cold hands.
10 and above	Philadelphia landlords finally turn up the heat. People in Wisconsin have the last cookout before it gets cold.	460 below	ALL atomic motion stops (absolute zero in the Kelvin scale). People in Wisconsin start saying, "Cold 'nuff for ya?"
0	People in Miami all die. Wisconsinites lick the flagpole.	500 below	Hell freezes over. The Brewers win the World Series!

- Madison team led three of these at mid-winter - faculty/staff, grad student, and junior/senior students.

Speaking of the weather and the cold winter weather lately, the above is offered for your enjoyment.

Alums who were undergrads in the Department of Soil Science might remember Dr. M.L. Jackson. He likely knew more about clay mineralogy than anyone in the whole world during his career. He passed away December 12, 2002 at the age of 88.

A man very few people in the turf industry didn't know passed away last December 30. I am speaking of Ray Christopherson; he was 84 years old.

Ray was as close as I will come to knowing an inventor, and he had the down-to-earth practical ability to go along with his creative mind. In 1937 he was hired as a tool and die apprentice at the J.I. Case Company in Racine, his home town. WWII saw him in the Navy, and after the war Ray, along with brothers Ralph and Les, went into business together in Racine as "Christy's Saw and Lawnmower Company."

For about 10 years Ray and Ralph owned and oper-



Ray Christopherson

ated Wisconsin Turf Equipment Corporation together, and for the last 20 years Ray owned and operated Terracare Products Company, Inc. in Pardeeville.

Thousands of golf course shops around the country have products designed and built by Ray in them. For us, it has ranged from a pair of Halgan Spinaway 42" rotary mowers to the 60" Terrator to the Terrabroom.

Ray was as kind and host and friendly as they come. He was always glad to see you and loved to talk about the care of turf. I'll miss him.

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 Dave Brandenburg wrote about the passing of another superintendent colleague and friend, Bruce Knickel. Here are Dave's words:

For those of you who may have met Bruce Knickel of Campbellsport through the years, I am sad to report that he died on Monday, February 3.

Bruce built and owned Indian Trails Golf Course in Campbellsport on the property he used to farm. He started out with a green and then a couple of par 3's and then slowly built it up until he had 18 holes with elevated tees and par fours and fives. At 81 years old he still did a majority of the work himself. I have ground greensmower reels for Bruce for a number of years, although he did his own gang reels. He said he did not trust himself with the greens reels.

Indian Trails is a private course for Bruce's friends and he charges no fees. He did use the barter system and traded tee signs and scorecards for play. He once told me he did not want to charge because he would have to follow the government's rules, not his own. He allowed the Campbellsport High School Golf Team to practice there since the course is across the street from the high school.

Never one to complain, Bruce has been battling

congestive heart failure for nine years. I last saw him in December and did not know. The medicines could not keep him going anymore, according to his son Steve.

Bruce was one of those grandfather figures you just wished would live forever. He always had a smile and a positive attitude. And from his hobby, you can tell he loved the game of golf and the career we all make our living from.

I think Bruce lived a life many of us dream about - build 18 holes for family and friends so that while you are pulling that gang mower, everyone knows your name and gives you a wave.

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 And so we close for another issue. I'll end by sending my "thank you" to our volunteer writers, our advertisers, our printer, and to Dave Brandenburg. *The Grass Roots* was selected for "Best" in its category in the 2002 GCSAA chapter publications contest. The Grass Roots is done for the right reasons, and the recognition for that is always nice. And what a terrific way *The Grass Roots* is to record, for all time, our history. It warms the cockles of the heart of the chapter historian.

Have a good spring; it's still possible, at this date, that 2003 will be our best year ever in golf. ♣

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