



# Another Perspective

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

Bogey Calhoun called early one morning last week to see if I wanted to ride along with him, Tom Morris and Steady Eddie Middleton up to Coon Valley to look at a tractor for his golf course

"Sure," I said, "as long as I can ride in the front seat."

"Fight it out with Tom Morris," he replied. I right then reconciled myself to the back seat of Bogey's "extended" cab pickup - tight quarters even for a fit and trim guy like me.

Calhoun has been looking for a decent used front end loader/backhoe for a couple of years, and his brother-in-law got a whiff of one that was available in west central Wisconsin. A landscape contractor had it advertised in the local shopper stopper that sounded to be in good condition with reasonable hours. Windshield time had been minimal for us this past winter and we were ready for a road trip and the good conversation that went along with it.

"They must trust me at the club," Calhoun said, "because the bookkeeper gave me a signed blank check!"

We had a great trip west and north of our home area. Although it was cold and there was still considerable snow on the ground, spring was in the air. It might have been the clear sky or the crisp air. Maybe it was the angle of the sun, or just maybe it was the watercress we stopped to harvest from the banks of Basswood Creek. My favorite salad green — a member of the mustard family — is at its prime when picked on one of the earliest days of spring. We had coolers along to keep it fresh until it made it to a salad bowl and drench with vinegar.

We made good time, found the contractor and the loader tractor. The loader was in unbelievable condition, so much so that Tom Morris was envious and would have loved seeing it parked in his shop. Bogey wrote out the check and negotiated a delivery time with the landscaper. He was elated over his used equipment coup, and he should have been.

"I am buying lunch," Bogey announced as we pulled into the small village of Nottingham, still buoyed by the great deal he had made for his course. We parked in front of the Brown Saddle Café, one of many pickups parked on the main street through town.

The Brown Saddle claimed to have the best hamburgers in Wisconsin, and that claim made it easy for the four of us to order. Deep-fried curds were brought out as baskets of hors d'oeuvres.

The conversation started on a subject we'd avoided on the trip up - winterkill. We all had ice on greens, as did nearly every other golf course in Wisconsin. Fear of

injury was running high all across the state and we started talking about what we were doing individually on our own courses.

The collective experiences and the literature on the subject of winter damage to turf are all over the place and our conversation reflected that. It wasn't long and some of the other Brown Saddle patrons were listening to our discussion (and debate).

Of course, in that part of the state, with small towns and villages and a predominantly rural culture, golf isn't as popular as, say, bowling or curling or softball. But the guys there in the café knew about winterkill.

"You guys could just as well be talking about alfalfa," said a man who introduced himself as Gene Stillmunkes. "Many of us up here in the boondocks are really worried about the hay crop we'll have this year. We don't know yet, but conditions for serious injury to hayfields were with us a lot of the winter. Some farmers are worried

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how they'll feed livestock herds next winter."

The four of us - Bogey, Tom, Eddie and me - listened closely as the conversation in the little restaurant turned to winterkill of crops other than bluegrasses and bent-grasses.

"What happens to a golf course when the winter weather takes out a crop?"

Bogey seemed really taken by the friendliness and curiosity of the locals and answered right away.

"Usually, if the damage is to putting greens and if it is serious enough, we mow a temporary putting area in the fairway," he said. "There isn't much you can do with tee or fairway damage, other than cultivate somehow and overseed."

"Can they still play golf then?" came the question from a table in one corner."

"Well, yes," came the somewhat reluctant reply from Calhoun. "But the product isn't what they are paying for and that causes problems."

"Doesn't seem as serious as losing your crop for the whole season," replied an older man who introduced himself as John Stone.

"Well," Bogey started, "when golf is your business, it is a serious setback."

"You are lucky you don't have to depend on an apple orchard," a man in bib overalls said from the lunch counter. "My brother owns an orchard down near Gays

Mills and the cold winter and early spring weather ruins his income about one year in five, somehow or other."

"Are those golf courses ruined for the entire year?" came a question from the next table.

"No," said Tom Morris, who wanted to get into the conversation. "We usually have the winterkill area back to 100% by Memorial Day or shortly after."

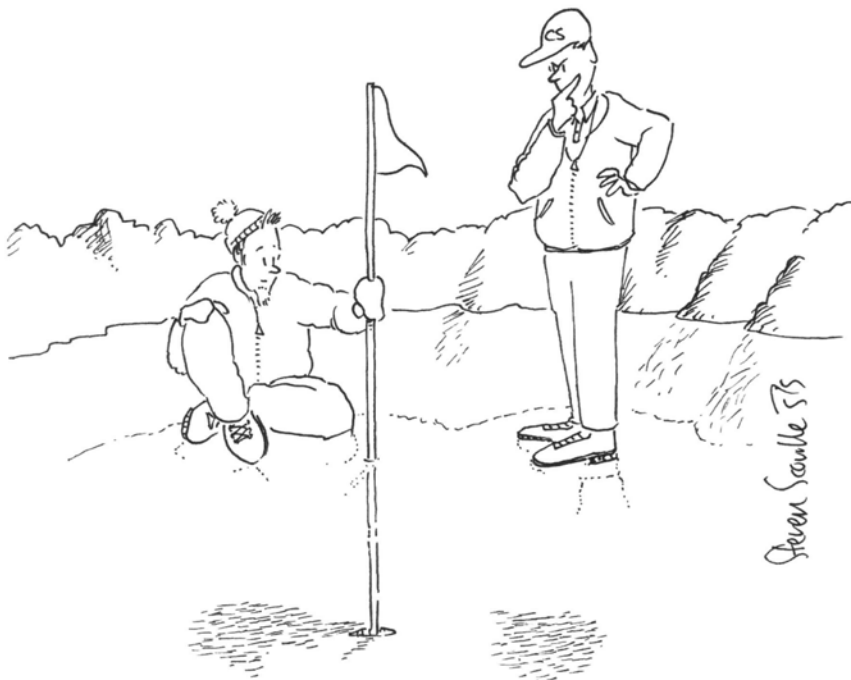
"That doesn't sound too serious to me," observed yet another of the guys in the café. A waitress busily filled coffee cups all around. "It isn't like losing all your hay crop or apple crop."

"Well, it has cost a few superintendents their job over the years," Calhoun said.

There was a moment of silence before one of the old boys said, "If you lose your job for something God did, that probably wouldn't be a very good job anyway."

We kind of looked at one another, nodded and agreed he had a point.

The chow was great, and we headed back after apple pie and cheddar cheese. We talked some more about our plans for spring, but with a little less worry than we had before lunch at the Brown Saddle. Sometimes you have to get a ways from home to get a good perspective on circumstance and problems, and in rural Wisconsin, that perception is pretty well grounded in common sense. We felt better about spring, regardless of what it might bring to us. ♣



"WE MAY HAVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE ICE ON THESE GREENS."