



# Real-life Mulligan

By Rob Schultz, *The Capital Times*

*Editor's Note: He's back! Former Grass Roots columnist Rob Schultz is returning to our journal to carry on his column, THE SPORTS PAGE. He continues to write great golf stories and articles for The Capital Times, and his beat also covers Wisconsin basketball.*

*Always entertaining, sometimes controversial and never at a loss of words, Rob plays bogey golf or better and has always recognized the role of the superintendent. We are delighted he is back.*

Take a good look at Dan Barrett and you probably won't notice anything wrong.

You won't notice the slight limp, or the oversized shoe he wears on his left foot. You do notice the oversized couch that seems out of place when you follow him into his industrial-looking office inside the Bergamont Golf Club maintenance building, but you'd never guess why it's there.

You also notice the burly, 6-foot-4 Barrett's warm smile and kind words as he greets a stranger. They stick out like Bergamont's perfectly manicured fairways traversing the hilly terrain outside Oregon. He still lives by the golden rule he was taught by his parents while growing up in Monroe.

That's particularly evident during these important days for Barrett, the 43-year-old superintendent at Bergamont. The back nine of the splendid course designed by Andy North opened Saturday, May 14th. By all accounts, it's in spectacular shape. The front nine is expected to open sometime next month.

"Everything's great," said Barrett proudly from his office as Bergamont dried out from a recent rain.

Nobody is disagreeing with him. Even those who know it can't possibly be true. That's because Barrett's definition of great includes overlooking a left ankle and foot that are virtually lifeless because of a freak medical condition that nearly took his life last January.

He spent 43 days in St. Mary's Hospital this winter after developing a blood clot in his left leg while suffering from a rare form of vasculitis called Wegener's granulomatosis.

The former three-sport athlete at Monroe High School spent some of those days wondering if he was going to live, more of them wondering if doctors were going to amputate his leg or his foot, which is still not out of the woods.

His first week in the hospital included three operations in three days. Barrett had four more operations, most of which were conducted to save his leg. Doctors had to

carve out dead muscle from his calf because the clot cut off the circulation of blood to the lower part of his left leg for more than six hours.

Even between surgeries, doctors would stop by and dig around his leg to remove dead muscle tissue. The swelling was so bad that doctors made incisions on both sides of his calf to allow the skin to expand.

Yet Barrett, whose kidneys also nearly shut down during his hospital stay because of the Wegener's granulomatosis, acts today as if nothing has happened.

He doesn't pout about a bad break in his life or whine about a setback at a critical juncture of his career. Instead, Barrett ignores the swelling in his calf and foot and works 14-hour days, seven days a week perfecting Bergamont.

The only breaks he takes are those rare moments when spreads out on his office couch to elevate his leg.

Like all quality golf course superintendents, Barrett knows no other way to work. Or live. He has been treating his medical condition no differently than if he found a rare disease attacking his greens. That means finding a way to live with a problem instead of waiting to die from it.

"I can't dwell on the bad. What happened, happened. We just have to deal with it and move on," explained Barrett, who is buoyed when he feels twinges and shooting pains in his foot. Those are signs of nerves coming to life, signs of recovery.

"My whole attitude in the hospital was that I was going to get better," he added. "I refused to let myself think negatively. Then I would've been depressed or whatever. It's amazing I never felt any of that."

Barrett is getting better by dwelling on the positive, like how the love from his wife, Sherri, helped him pull through. Sherri Barrett never left her husband's side during the worst of it. That meant sleeping for three straight weeks on a cot in his hospital room.

And then there were his friends who found a way to keep a smile on his face. North was a frequent visitor and called when he was out of town.

"He never complained about anything," recalled North, who has formed a strong bond with Barrett. "I called him at the hospital and he was going to find out later that afternoon if he was going to lose his leg. And he was saying, 'Everything looks like it's going OK.'"

Randy Smith, Barrett's mentor at Nakoma Golf Club and his assistant at Bergamont, took care of his house while the childless Barretts were in the hospital. Barrett's sister-in-law took care of their two golden retrievers.

His fellow superintendents helped, too. Area superin-



tendents like Blackhawk's Monroe Miller, Maple Bluff's Tom Harrison and Edelweiss' Jim Scott stayed in touch. So did the O.J. Noer Center's Tom Schwab, who once taught Barrett the business at Monroe Country Club.

Barrett's buddies up north really came to his aid. He came to Bergamont last July after spending 16 years at Trout Lake Golf and Country Club in Arbor Vitae. The Northern Great Lakes Golf Course Superintendents Association, of which he was a vital member while at Trout Lake, created a relief fund to help pay Barrett's medical expenses that his insurance didn't cover.

Finally, Barrett found strength in the knowledge that his father-in-law remained active after losing an arm and a leg in a farming accident about 20 years ago. "He's getting around great," Barrett said. "He was probably good for me to talk to, to learn how he's done since his accident."

There is still a chance Barrett could lose his foot. Doctors are concerned that if he can't regain much feeling in it, he could injure it without realizing it - by stepping on a nail, for instance.

"But right now they're very encouraged by what's happening and we don't think we'll have to do that," said Barrett, who added that he may also consider amputation if a prosthesis can offer more productivity and mobility.

"I know I could do my job either way," he said.

And that's what is most important, although Barrett said his illness taught him that he needs to spend more time with his wife, friends and family. It also taught him to be more patient at work and not expect instant results.

His best therapy will always be Bergamont and making sure it looks its best for golfers playing it.

"I love what I do. For me, being able to get out here and do it, yeah, this is great," Barrett said. "My wife always told me that she has never met anybody who enjoys going to work more than me. I get up in the morning and can't wait to get here... That has helped me gain some of my strength back and my mobility."

You could say Barrett and Bergamont have something in common. Both are in a state of transition but nobody could tell it because they're already looking so good.

"For me, it's important to get it to the level we all want it to be at. So I have that challenge out there that I'm trying to achieve," said Barrett.

He was speaking about Bergamont. But anyone who knows Barrett knows he might as well have been talking about himself and his recovery. ♣



HENRY A. KOSHOLLEK/THE CAPITAL TIMES

Dan Barrett spent 43 straight days in the hospital this winter after developing a blood clot in his leg, but recovered in time to get the Bergamont Golf Club ready for its inaugural season.

## PUT IT ON YOUR CALENDAR

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*Summer  
Field Day*

**July 26, 2005**

**O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research  
and Educational Facility  
Verona, Wisconsin**

