



Thanks for the Opportunity

By Rod Johnson



Where have the past two years gone? It seems like only yesterday that I nervously stood in front of this group thanking you for the opportunity to serve as President of this organization. The task at hand seemed very clear and I was anxious to tackle the challenge.

In writing my final message to you, I thought it would be appropriate to return to the January/February 1990 issue of this journal to gauge my thoughts about WGCSA; then versus now; to compare what I envisioned then, as to what happened; to examine my goals for WGCSA - versus the results.

Two years ago, I stated my goal to see the successful completion of the fundraising drive and the construction of the O.J. Noer Center for Turfgrass Research. The Noer Center, once thought an unattainable goal, has been constructed and has a full-time manager. Next year promises the establishment of plot work and the first of many meaningful research projects.

The 25th Anniversary Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium proved to be a special event and a stepping stone towards the future of the event. I hope to remain an active part of the Symposium Commit-

tee. The evaluations made by attendees will be used to make the small changes to enhance membership participation and benefit.

Two years ago, many of my thoughts dealt with our relationship with other groups. I was somewhat critical and concerned by the perception of an identity crisis between ourselves and WTA, O.J. Noer Foundation, and the O.J. Noer Center. As WGCSA members, we should be proud of the leadership role we have in WTA and the O.J. Noer Foundation and be further proud of our major contribution towards the construction of the O.J. Noer Center. The common goals of WTA and WGCSA continue to be of the utmost importance.

We continue to be appropriately involved with other groups in the Wisconsin golf industry. We have seen numerous examples of our profession receiving credit due for its role in golf. As our professionalism and the recognition of our role increases, so will our involvement with these other groups.

I stand firm on my opinion that for many WGCSA is a social organization. This is NOT a negative. Our profession

and ultimately our employers profit from the camaraderie and the idea exchange that our organization affords.

I offer this analysis, not as a personal report card of time served, but as a reference to where WGCSA is today—versus two years ago. As previously stated, the role of President is not to subject the membership to personal preferences and opinions, but rather to listen to the opinions of others and then make them the basis of decisions.

I am indebted to many not just for their help during my term as president of WGCSA, but for their roles in my professional development. Avoiding the risk of offending by omission, I offer my wholehearted thanks.

I thank the board of directors and the membership of Pine Hills for their support and encouragement of my involvement.

There is a tremendous amount of talent within this organization. I encourage and I challenge all of you to become involved. The rewards far outweigh the efforts.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity.

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The Late Season Superintendent

By Monroe S. Miller

Anyone who lives in New England or who travels there as often as I have has heard this saying: "You can always tell a Harvard man, but you can't tell him much." I've heard the same thing said about Norwegians and politicians.

By this time in the golf season, the same could be said about a golf course superintendent. You won't be able to tell him much; he isn't listening anymore.

By this time in the golf season, when we are so close to the end, he's heard everything at least a hundred times. His intensity level has dropped noticeably; his ambition is waning. He is, simply put, exhausted, both physically and mentally.

Despite the beautiful autumn season, he glances at his watch frequently. He is not looking for the minute or the hour, but rather the date. "Two weeks until Thanksgiving," he says with a sigh. "It will soon be over."

Someone riding by a Wisconsin golf course this time of year might remark on what a picturesque scene it makes; the setting can be lovely. On a day when the sky is unclouded, the misty light of late fall makes the leaves remaining on the trees seem as colorful as they were two weeks previous. Such a spectator would probably enjoy the cheery sound of the mowers and the tractors at all the different quarters of the golf course. The sight of the players in their fall garb adds to the scenery.

But to be a tourist and to be a toiler in a scene like this are two very different things late in the golf season.

The late season superintendent is working harder now than he was during the height of the golf season. The crew has usually shrunk by two-thirds, leaving him little choice but to assume the hat(s) of equipment operator, cup cutter and spray technician.

He wouldn't mind those things at all, if someone else was handling his other duties. Remember, late season is the time for budgeting and bidding, year end reporting and winter planning. There are seemingly endless committee meetings, too.

Worry is a part of the life of the late season superintendent. Halloween can, literally, be a nightmare for him. He knows he has no second chances with low temperature fungicide applications or irrigation system winterization. The golf course operation is more forgiving in the other seasons; there is no forgiveness in the late season.

Frustration is there, too. He sees days of golden opportunity, chances to get major work done. Too often, it's the old 'no money, no staff' story. The players will be upset when the same projects are started in June next year.

The late season superintendent is weary of the seven-day work week grind. He aches to go to church with the rest of his family; he actually begins thinking of how nice it would be to "sleep in" until 7:00 a.m., or to even have a day off.

His equipment exacerbates his frustration. Late season machinery is less dependable than it is after a winter trip through the shop. Maybe equipment gets tired, too.

Believe it or not, the late season superintendent is a little lonely. The monthly WGCSA educational program is completed; the Symposium is over. He won't be seeing his colleagues again for quite awhile. And he finds himself missing the college and high school kids who were around all summer. They not only worked hard, but their happy and upbeat attitude kept everybody in good spirits. Even on a bad day.

The golf course is even a little lonely. These acres were meant for players and they just don't look the same without them.

The late season superintendent doesn't have much of a sense of humor. Please forgive him. He's heard "lay that sod with the green side up" more times than he cares to think about. Don't ask him if he "likes his job better than working" and for heaven's sake do not make any remark about "riding around in a golf cart all day."

Don't be offended when the late season superintendent looks straight ahead when he passes you on the golf course. He's reluctant to establish any eye-to-eye contact; he isn't in the mood for any chipper conversation about golf or the golf course.

If you are able to engage the late season superintendent in a conversation, for your own sake don't ask him what he's going to do all winter. The question grinds on his nerves in the middle of the year. Now, that dreaded question could precipitate a rude (or worse) reaction.

And, after so many months of really excellent playing conditions, don't grumble to the late season superintendent about green speed (too slow) or the length of the fairway grasses (too long). You might find yourself on a mower.

Don't bug him about moving the cups more often; he did it himself yesterday and it was nearly dark before he was done.

It has probably always been this way with Wisconsin golf course superintendents. With the changing seasons come the changing attitudes. By late season, those of us in this business need a couple of months of normal scheduling to recapture the enthusiasm and high level of energy that will be needed next year to provide the things golfers want and expect.

It may be that the drastic changes in the mindset are what make the profession so appealing to those of us in it.

But in the late season, sometimes I wonder. Ask me again next spring.



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Is It Time to Leave the Pfister?

By Monroe S. Miller

What a terrible question for a traditional, cautious Wisconsin born and educated golf course superintendent to ask.

The Pfister has been home to the Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium for all but a couple of its 26 meetings. The meeting and the meeting place have been hand in hand so often that to suggest, or even mention, a change of venue seems a near sacrilege.

I attended, years ago, one of those meetings not held at the Pfister Hotel. The Marc Plaza was adequate, but it wasn't the same as the Pfister. It wasn't acceptable. Fortunately, we haven't returned there.

The Pfister is a traditional kind of place and offers an ambience you'll never see in newer facilities. It has also been an excellent place to spend the night. The tower rooms have been reasonably affordable and comfortable. The hotel stay for the Symposium was almost a visit to the past. It was enjoyable.

The meeting room we have always used is perfectly sized, also comfortable and very suitable for our meeting needs.

The banquet facilities have worked for us, too. The Old English Room provides the perfect setting for the speaker dinner on the eve of the meeting itself.

For those staying at the Pfister and for most of those driving to the Symposium each day, the hotel provided parking. It was easy, convenient, safe and enclosed.

The downtown location has been a plus, to my notion. Great restaurants, the Grand Avenue Mall, some great bookstores and a generally secure setting made the trip to the Symposium a little bit special.

Although Cheryl and I have never been able to do it, spouses of some attending the meeting have come along to enjoy Milwaukee for a day and a half.

I am, however, starting to question my affection for the Pfister as a meeting place for the Symposium.

Fast changing conditions in Milwaukee specifically and society generally have precipitated the question in the title: "is it time to leave the Pfister and downtown Milwaukee?"

As soon as I arrived on Monday afternoon I was greeted by the headline of the *Milwaukee Sentinel*: "Six killings push city murder toll to 146." I thought maybe I was in Detroit or Houston or Chicago. But Milwaukee?

Wisconsin's largest city just isn't safe anymore. The downtown area, which for so long has been inviting, now sends shivers up my spine. I find I am not alone in that feeling, either.

A walk from the hotel to a restaurant, by myself, brought me harassment from a miserable looking panhandler who lowered his request from "a couple of bucks" down to a quarter. When he realized I wasn't going to donate to a bum, he started shouting. An incident such as this one is a bad moon on the rise. The next beggar might have a weapon.

The Pfister is slipping a little bit, too. Parking, provided as recently as last year to registered guests, is now \$8 a day.

The room was overpriced and not especially clean. The sound system in the meeting room still doesn't work, and other audio/visual aids failed.

And I'd love to know how much the two cold sandwiches and potato salad served at the noon luncheon cost. My guess is they were probably priced over the \$4.95 the meal was really worth.

Put all these negatives together just after the meeting and the title question doesn't seem so outrageous.

Forced to answer "yes" or "no" to my own question, I am not certain how I would answer at this moment. And I don't have an alternative to offer, either.

But I do believe the Symposium committee needs to make this issue a part of the planning process for 1992.

It would be a shame to wait until someone is hurt to decide that "yes, now is finally the time to put history and tradition by the way and leave the Pfister."



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Autumn is a Time to Reflect

By Rob Schultz

There are few things golfers in Wisconsin dread more than the numbing winds and the frosty mornings of late autumn.

In a few weeks, the clubs will find a snug corner of the basement and serve as a reminder of past enjoyment every time you trudge past them.

My pleasures on the golf course were few and far between in 1991. In past summers, I always found a way to sneak out at least three times a week. But this year, the University of Wisconsin athletic department's decision to cut sports, the Green Bay Packers' miseries and, most important, a new addition to my family named Elizabeth cut my rounds down drastically.

It's not that there weren't highlights on the links. The opening of the University of Wisconsin golf course stands high on my list. It was a highlight because I watched the school grumble over whether to build it for so many years, then I watched the actual construction and, finally, I got a chance to play it.

Funny, but I liked the course more before it was opened. There was something special about walking alone on the quiet, pristine fairways of one of the country's best new layouts before the hackers took mounds of divots out of it.

There were other highlights, too, and they didn't always deal with an exceptional shot. Here are my five most memorable golf moments of 1991:

1) *The big choke.* In mid-June I was playing golf with three buddies at the beautiful new Cedar Creek Country Club in Onalaska when I faced a 100-foot, three-breaker putt. We were playing 36 holes that day and I had been putting miserably. My playing partners were big gamblers and as I set up to putt Larry Gessler gave 200 to 1 odds that I couldn't get down in two. Scott Schwendemann handed him five bucks and the bet was on.

I didn't know about the bet and stroked my first putt to within three feet of the hole. Feeling real good about myself, I strutted up to the ball to knock it in the

hole for par. That's when Schwendemann told me about the bet and said he'd split the profits with me if I made the putt. Hands shaking, the putt rolled past the hole. It took Gessler 10 minutes to stop laughing.

2) *A fun round.* Early in September, good friend Gary Van Sickle drove to Madison to play the UW course. Van Sickle is a former *Milwaukee Journal* writer who is now the PGA Tour writer for *Golf World* magazine. He heard me rave about the UW course and had to find out for himself how good it was.

We played with UW pro Dave Steffan and Pleasant View pro Ted Donker, an old friend from Oshkosh who I replaced 20 years ago as the night water man for the front 9 greens at Lake Shore Municipal Golf Course. That was back when we used to water with hoses.

Anyway, I had a wonderful time as we took turns telling stories, laughing, poking fun at each other and playing some pretty good golf. Donker shot a 68. Steffan, who is perfect for the role of director of golf for the UW course, was in the low 70s. Van Sickle and I struggled in the low 80s. But, with the exception of Donker's score, it didn't matter what we shot. We were having too much fun.

3) *The Odana hacker.* I don't usually like going to the course by myself and not knowing who I'm going to play with. Leave yourself at the mercy of the pro shop guys and you usually end up playing with beginners. It can make for a dreadful day.

On this day at Odana Hills I ended up with a hacker and he was playing horribly. But on the par-5 11th, after he dribbled a drive, dribbled his second shot and dribbled his third, he smoked his fourth shot about 180 yards and it rolled right into the hole for a birdie.

The man's face lit up like the sun. His eyes grew large, he let out a belly laugh and had a fresh bounce to his step the rest of the day. It was pure pleasure to play with him because that shot made him so happy. He'll remember it for the rest of his life. I couldn't help thinking

that that is what golf is supposed to be about.

4) *The dreaded 16th at Oakland Hills.* There are certain holes in the world that stick out in most everybody's memory and the dogleg 16th at Oakland Hills ranks right up there with the 18th at Pebble Beach, the 12th at Augusta and the 17th at the TPC at Sawgrass.

In September, when I was in Detroit to cover the Packers' early-season embarrassing loss to the Lions, Oakland Hills' famed superintendent Ted Woehrle was gracious enough to let Green Bay radio man, Mark Daniels, and me return to play his course that had just hosted the U.S. Senior Open.

I was playing fairly well—I was 2-over on the back nine—and had hit a perfect drive at the 16th when I faced the same shot that had sunk more than a few of the world's greatest golfers. I needed to hit a shot 140 yards, over water, to a green that jutted out into that water. The pin was tucked far to the right side, which was closest to the water. It was the same pin placement that's used for the final rounds of all major tournaments that have been held there for the past jillion years.

My lie was good, but I had a downhill stance and I knew the ball would move to the right. I adjusted for the fade, stood over the ball...and froze. I couldn't swing the club. Sweat poured out of my hands like fibs from a politician. When I finally pulled the trigger, my eight iron felt like a sledge hammer.

The ball headed for the pin but it started to fade. Oh (bleep). It hit the right side of the green and then...splash. Daniels looked at me and asked if I wanted a cherry lifesaver.

But I was OK. When I see the world's greatest players try that shot in future U.S. Opens, I'll know exactly how they feel, especially if they fail.

5) *Two near aces.* OK, for all of you who think I'm one of the biggest choke artists in the history of golf, here's a story that may refute that. I was playing in a Wisconsin Newspaper Association

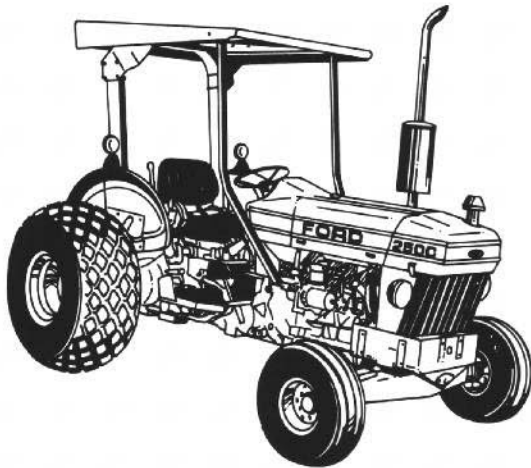
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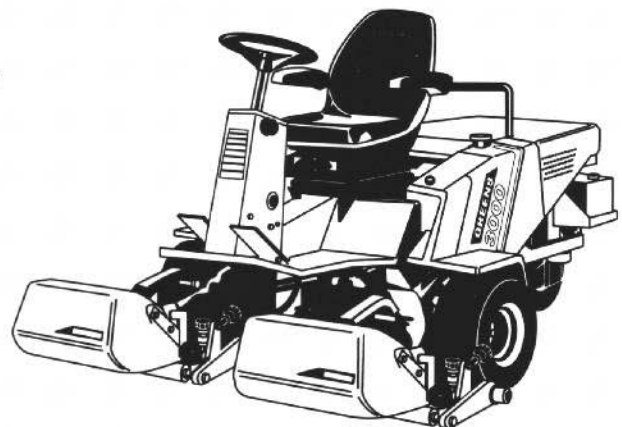
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(Continued from page 7)

outing at Devil's Head and anyone who aced the par-3 7th hole would have received \$10,000.

Now such a deal usually is enough to shake the bejesus out of anybody, but I had a strange feeling when I came to the rather simplistic 140-yard hole. I had played Devil's Head earlier in the year and remembered hitting an eight iron over the green. This time I smoked a nine iron and it had the flag covered. At the very last second a wisp of wind moved the ball and it missed dropping in the hole by six inches.

The golf outing officials standing on the tee behind me checked their underwear after I hit my shot. One second after I tapped in for birdie, my playing partner, Rob Zaleski, said, "Don't even think about it."

Later in the round, at the 200-yard par-3 17th, I hit a three-iron shot that landed even closer to the hole than my shot at No. 7. There was no money involved if I had aced it but it didn't matter. The fact I nearly aced two holes in one round was enough pleasure, and yes, agony, for one day.

Looking back, I realize that all my memorable moments had one common denominator: I was having a good time with good friends.

Golf is not as much about sport as it is friendship. To enjoy the game at its fullest, forget about your grip, your swing and keeping your head down. Just think about your friends and the beauty of the course that surrounds you. Those are the key ingredients to any memorable moment.



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