



Forget the idyllic images on the scorecard and brochures. We were greeted by aerated, bumpy greens and muddy ponds such as this one that were half empty.



## **Reflections of a River Rat:**

### Character assassins are par for the course in my golf league

My Wednesday golf league doesn't end amid the pines and maples where a precise wedge shot spins and screeches to a halt on the green, then a smoothly stroked putt trickles into the cup.

Nope. That seems like a PGA of America commercial. There are no applauding galleries or nouveau art trophies or cardboard checks the size of an economy car.

The harsh end to my golf league ends immediately after our season-ending tournament in a dining room where 24 men, tired and sweaty from a painstaking round that lasted 4 hours and 45 minutes but resembled Caddyshack on a video loop, amped up on beer and cocktails, irked by their ineptitude on the course, try to conduct a league business meeting. Prison riots are settled more easily.



**Our usual playing partners -- Dave Shelp and Chuck Winterberger -- in the season-ending tournament dumped us this year. Was it our lousy play or just a lack of fresh jokes?**

The problem with these grumpy old men is that we all want the meeting to end a few milliseconds after it starts. We all want whatever prize money we might have carved out of the pot, we all want to sprint to our cars, but we all want to talk at the same time and offer aloud our favorite barbs. We have transported ourselves back in time to the junior high boys locker room. We might as well have issued towels to snap. We morph into sarcastic character assassins.

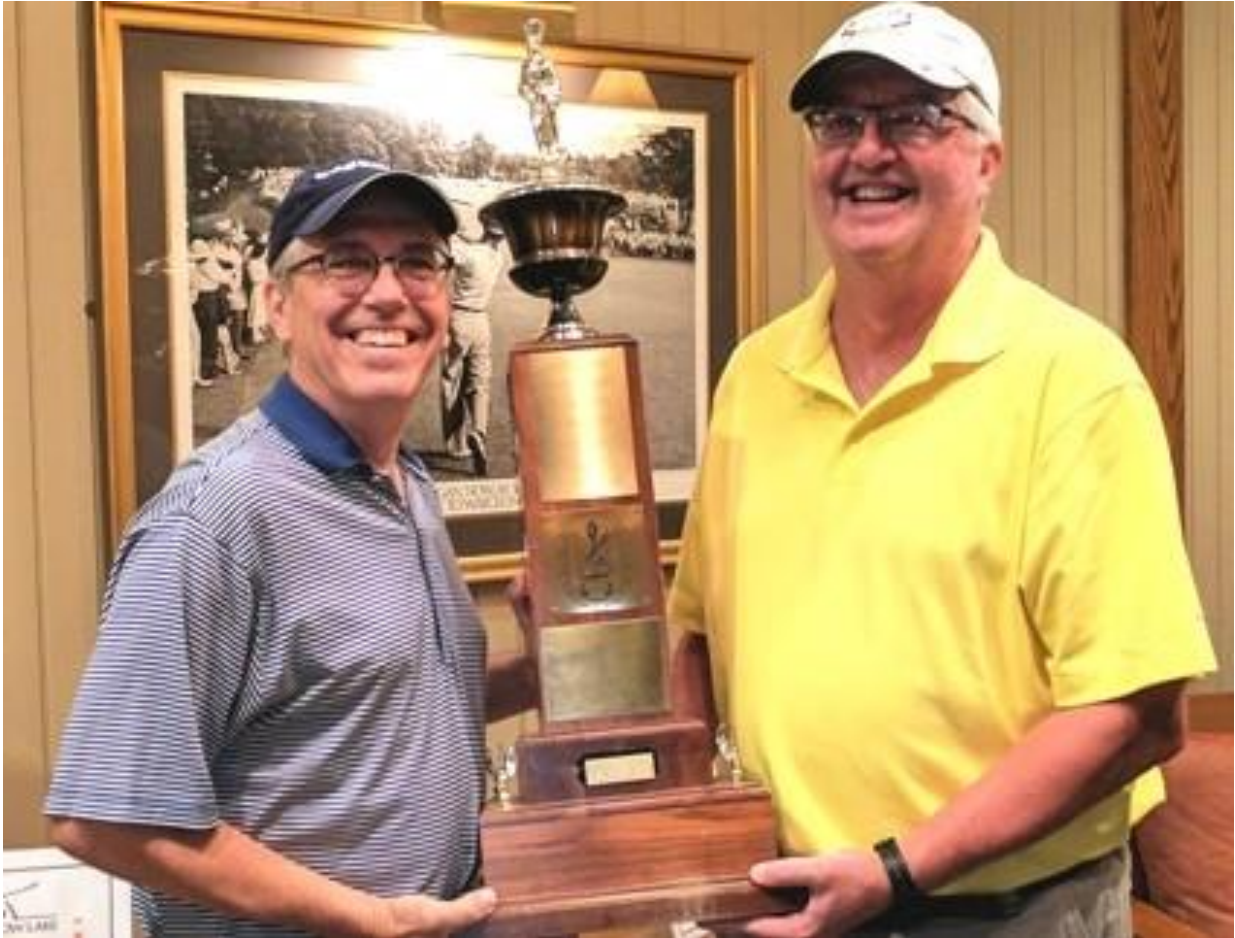
Long before Damir -- his last name was withheld to protect him from Internet stalkers -- opened the meeting with an earnest plea for greater reliance on electronic scoring, the grumbling had begun on the first tee.

"It would be nice if they had printed out the pairings and the tournament rules for each cart."

"Who the hell runs the longest-drive contest on the first hole."

"WTF. Didn't these guys know they aerated the greens last week? They're bumpier than the road to Kyiv."

The grumbling was exacerbated by the tournament's usual frustrations of topped drives, shanked approaches, and lipped-out putts.



**The only time we won the league, partner Jim Gertner and I commandeered the biggest trophy in the Shadow Lake clubhouse and pretended it was our prize.**

“Where’s the beverage cart girl? Since when did this become a dry county?”

The sarcastic barbs had been festering for about 45 minutes at the 19<sup>th</sup> hole by the time my group, which started last, reached the clubhouse.

“We’ve been waiting on you guys. Are you the poster boys for slow play?”

“Nice hat. You should keep it on because there’s a lot of glare off your male pattern baldness.”

Dinner was more of the same as we shuffled through the buffet line.

Said the first hacker-turned-culinary critic: “The sausage and pasta look good, but the chicken has no breasts.”

Responded his friend: “If you want breasts, you have to go to the Klassy Kat.”



After we ate dinner and carved up everyone's reputations, we waited for the two guys who ran the year-end tournament to finish the scoring. The Titanic sunk faster, and the reference seemed plausible. One guy hummed the music from Final Jeopardy!

"Geez, is Dan marking up the scores or lapping up the Maker's Mark?"

"This is the year 2022. There's no laptop, no scoreboard. Is Joe going to take off his shoes to count the scores?"

It took the Lord three days to rise from the dead. We figured these guys were a distant second place.



**Golf becomes more of a passion than a mere game when you play it in January.**

My golf partner, Jim Gertner, and I had run this tournament a few years ago. We incorporated a team Stableford scoring system and contests for low gross and low net scores, longest drive and closest to the pin. We posted giant scoresheets on the dining room walls so you could read everyone's hole-by-hole score and figure out who won skins (lowest score on a hole) and figure out who shot a radio station (101, 102 ... ). We

collected photos throughout the year and made a hilarious Powerpoint spoof that lampooned everyone.

This year? Nothing. Nada. Zilch. The inmates were ready to take over the nuthouse. A couple of guys wandered off to the bar. When the skins were announced, Dan and Joe doled out the cash, then had to ask for the money back. They cited a scoring mistake, then they reversed themselves ... twice more. Money was being waved like the craps game from "Guys n' Dolls." It only fomented the grumbling.

Back to Damir, who was opening the business portion of this gathering.

"For next year, if one person in every group would use his phone to enter real-time scores into the app, we could eliminate paper scorecards," he asserted.

“We can’t even add scores,” wisecracked another. “If we go electronic, we should have paper backups.”

Then I offered my suggestion over the cacophony: “I think we should collect the scorecards and appoint a special master.”

The talk droned on about a position round after the 11<sup>th</sup> week, waving groups ahead on a bottleneck hole, and scheduling informal pot games while the weather was still good.

That’s when I called out to the waitress observing from the doorway.

“Will there be a breakfast buffet?”

It didn’t take much longer. Enough guys spied the darkness gathering outdoors and figured it was time to head home. The most surprising thing – no selfies. In fact, nobody took pictures with their phone.

Mercifully, after 16 weeks of failing to break par but always busting each other’s Titleists, golf league screeched to a halt. Or perhaps it just went out-of-bounds for the offseason.

Time to put the clubs in the garage and check on the snowblower.

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