



THE FINAL WORD

DENNIS MCCANN

Getting involved

Let's ban fishing and fill up the tee sheet

The highlight of last year's golf season came not on the course but on hilly Rittenhouse Avenue in Bayfield, where on one October Sunday the Apostle Highlands Golf Course Precision Marching Foursome made its first-ever appearance in the big Apple Festival parade.

There were, of course, only three of us and we were hardly precise because that was the joke. But our three-man foursome – it also included our PGA pro Barry Hansen and my friend Rich Aamodt – stepped lively down the street with golf bags over our shoulders and used golf balls to hand out instead of candy, and when we paused to perform our routine – we raised our drivers like swords and marched leftward in an imprecise circle – the crowd loved us.

Let's hope the silliness inspired a few of them to come play golf. I used to say that I liked fishing, not because I fish – the closest I get to a hook is my golf swing – but because lots of other folks do fish and that keeps them off golf courses I want to play. Same with bowling and hunting and any other endeavor that cut down the competition for tee times.

Not anymore. Since becoming involved with the governing board at my home course, Apostle Highlands GC in Bayfield, I now view fishing as the competition, along with sailing, shopping, kayaking and any other endeavor that keeps vacationers from playing golf while in Bayfield. I still love those days when I am on the course with no group slowing us from the front or chasing hard from behind, but those days don't pay the bills and keep the operation healthy.

Ban fishing, I say, and let's fill up that tee sheet.

Granted, that's a bit harsh and not fair to the area's fine bait shops. But you get my point; the economy has shown signs of performing better in 2010 than it did last year but for many businesses – and while golf is a game it is a business first – it's still a jungle out there. How much have I changed my stripes? Just before sitting down to write this I spent some quality phone time



No precision here, and not even a foursome.

with a guy from a Twin Cities-based golf publication trying to plant a golf and travel story about the beautiful Bayfield peninsula in order to lure more Minnesotans this summer. Yes, Minnesotans, gopher head covers, Viking fandom and all. John Daly's makeover has nothing on mine.

My involvement grew not out of some sense of altruism but from an even higher motive – selfishness. Like too many others, our course had serious financial issues to deal with and if I wanted to ensure its

future there was nothing to do but get involved. I wasn't the only one who did, and I'm not suggesting my modest efforts (or maybe immodest, since I'm writing about them) made a big difference. In the end, a generous investment by one of our directors and his family produced a bigger impact than any of the too many meetings I sat in on, but the bottom line – yes, I'm now a bottom line guy – is that we are in far better shape than a year ago and looking forward to 2010.

We have big plans, perhaps some joint efforts with Chequamegon Bay GC in Ashland to cooperatively market the area, enhanced leagues to get more locals on the course, more member involvement in adopting holes and volunteering. Last summer we painted the clubhouse exterior, which was a vast improvement, and this winter are remodeling the interior so we can expand food and beverage choices and make a few dollars in the process. Maybe the Precision Marching Foursome will come up with a few new wrinkles for the fall parade, though probably not kilts like the bagpipers in front of us wore.

So as I told the Minnesotans (yes, Minnesotans!), put us in your plans. We can't guarantee good scores but do have one of the most scenically pleasing courses you'll ever see. Play golf in the morning, sail in the afternoon. Heck, fish if you must, but then play golf. As I mentioned, our foursome always has room for one more. ■

Regular contributor Dennis McCann's latest book, a colorful look at Wisconsin cemeteries, will be in bookstores soon.

DON ALBRECHT