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**Fat Accompli: The Fatty Open, an annual celebration of golf and gluttony in New Haven, Conn., is the only tournament in which no one has ever hit it thin.**

**By Franz Lidz**

A five-iron in one hand, two pepperoni sticks in the other, Greg Laugeni clomps across the parking lot at the Yale Golf Course, chewing the fat with his playing partner, John Hardy. Considering that Laugeni weighs 390 pounds and Hardy 530, there's a lot of fat to chew.

Laugeni plops down at the temporary nurse's station that has been set up outside the clubhouse and has his blood pressure taken. When the nurse tells him it's 158 over 120, he nearly plotzes. "If you're right," says Laugeni, a 36-year-old contractor from Woodbridge, Conn., "I should have died nine days ago!"

"Eight," she says.

Hardy's turn. A look of incredulity spreads across the nurse's face. "You're 200 over 100!" she says, flicking the gauge with her finger. "This may be a world record. Have you ever had a cholesterol count?"

"Cholesterol!" harrumphs Hardy, a 35-year-old energy broker from Newington, Conn. "Lady, with blood pressure this high, what's the difference?"

Hardy and Laugeni were in New Haven, Conn., on July 31 for the Fatty Open, an annual celebration of golf and gluttony put on by the course and its chubby chef, 230-pound Dave Horton. The one-day, four-man scramble is perhaps the only sporting event with a weight minimum: Entrants are penalized 25 cents for every pound less than 250. It's also the only golf tournament in which the big prizes go for the highest score on the scale rather than the lowest score on the course.

Before play began each of the 88 golfers, who came from as far away as Florida, was required to sit on a large scale rigged to a forklift. Hardy, Laugeni and the rest of their team weighed in at 1,520 pounds--580 pounds more than the four guys who posted the low team score, not that anybody seemed to care much. Hardy's fulsome foursome took the day's most coveted prize, for total heft (each of them was awarded a 50-pound block of butter, a 24-roll pack of toilet paper and a chocolate chip cookie the size of a manhole cover), as easily as Hardy took the prize for highest blood pressure (10 pounds of pepperoni and a George Foreman Grill; Hardy was only moderately miffed that the grill didn't come with a car adapter). "I'll never get to be the fattest golfer in the Fatty Open," grouched 265-pounder Mike Guerra. "Hardy makes me look like a pencil-neck."

Called Hardware during his days, he says, as a defensive tackle at Ole Miss, Hardy is a Victoria Falls of flab. Compared with him, former offensive tackle Laugeni, who overheated so often while playing for Holy Cross that he was dubbed the Radiator, is a mere cascade.

The weights of the quartet's other two members--315-pound Brian (Happy Tuna) Marcucio and 285-pound Wayne (Cracker) Rydzy--seemed feathery by comparison. "It's flattering to be part of this group," said Marcucio while posing for a team photo. "This is the first picture ever taken of me in which I didn't have to try to look thin."

The remainder of the Fatty field was larded with plump plumbers, stout salesmen, round restaurateurs, portly private eyes, fleshy florists and one overnourished undertaker. "We need an undertaker on site," said Horton. "Just in case." Horton came up with the idea for the Fatty Open in 1997. He was out on the links when one of his buddies said, "Will you look at all the porkers out here!"

"You know, you're right," said Horton. "Let's have a tournament for them."

Displaying the perseverance of his namesake in the Dr. Seuss classic, Horton somehow cajoled the director of the renowned 74-year-old Yale course into hosting the fatfest. The proceeds help fund research for a Yale Psychiatric Institute study of--what else?--eating disorders. "It's less a tournament than a tailgate party," Horton says. "It's not really about golf. It's about food."

Horton provides lots of it: Besides a buffet lunch and dinner, each golfer gets a gift bag that includes Oreos, Slim Jims and a pack of Alka-Seltzer. Barbecued franks and burgers await players at the 3rd hole, where hitting closest to the buffet table (about a 265-yard drive) gets you a microwave oven. (In the event of a tie, the ball closest to the mayonnaise wins; last year, Rydzy claimed the prize after his ball landed in a hot dog roll.)

Alas, not one of the golfers was female. Horton hopes to have a women's division, but in three years he hasn't had a single applicant. "Women get a little nutty about their weight," he says. "When guys get big and fat and sloppy, they don't care."

Laugeni is living proof of that. He was almost misty-eyed as he recalled the Zen-like state of bliss he reached in college, when one night, he says, he became "at one" with 12 lobsters, 72 jumbo shrimp, 14 eight-ounce steaks, three slices of prime rib ("not slabs--you know, thin"), a pineapple and three bottles of wine. "My roommate watched me in awe," Laugeni says. "Then he went into the bathroom and threw up."

Not surprisingly, Laugeni and Hardy were each assigned his own cart for the tournament. "This course is very hilly, and if those two were in the same vehicle, I'd be a little nervous about the brakes," said Horton. "Remember what happened to John Candy in Stripes: During basic training he started running and couldn't stop until he reached the next state."

A light rain is falling as Hardy looms over his ball on the 1st tee. He hits his drive a little chunky; the low liner makes straight for a flock of Canadas wading in Griest Pond. "The geese are running!" shouts Marcucio.

"They ought to be," Rydzy says. "John looks like he's hungry."

Rydzy's opening drive bends over a corner of the water hazard before breaching the fairway, and his approach bounds across the wildly undulating green, stopping five feet from the cup. When Laugeni sinks the putt for a birdie, he and Hardy celebrate by banging bellies like Fantasia hippos. The force of the collision causes office buildings to sway in Bridgeport, 20 miles away.

As the portly procession plods uphill to the next tee box, a fellow fatty drives by. "If you see a Maxfli in the rough," he says, "pick it up for me, will you?"

"Sorry," says Laugeni. "I haven't been able to bend over since '89."

By the time the foursome reaches the 4th hole, the drizzle has turned to a steady downpour. Their clothes are soaked. Laugeni tugs at the black shirt he wore to slenderize himself as he shares with his fellow golfers his theory on slices. "You want to know what makes a really good pizza?" he says. "I'll tell you what. The sauce." He champions the sausage pie at Zuppardi's in New Haven. "They make their own hot sausage on the premises and throw it on the pie in clumps," he says. "Nothing beats a Zuppardi's pie."

Hardy demurs. "Have you ever had the white clam pizza at Pepe's?" he asks. "Clams, garlic and a layer of mozzarella. No tomato sauce."

"Pepe's?" says Laugeni. "What about Sally's? I'd settle for Sally's bacon, mushroom and pepper pie. If I'm in the mood for a little twist, I ask them to toss in a few dollops of ricotta."

Hardy is now salivating like one of Pavlov's pups. "I'd take Pepe's pizza over sex," he says. "The wait outside is an hour and a half."

Which is only slightly longer than the backup at the snack shed behind the tee box for the par-3 9th hole. The rain falls in fat drops now as the players gaze out at this famous green, which keeps going and going and going for maybe 50 yards. Bisected by an eight-foot-wide swale, the green is about the size of one of the double greens on the Old Course at St. Andrews. In other words, it's almost as big as Hardy's appetite. "My game is totally screwed up now," he says. "All I can think about is that pizza."

The other three confess that they are having similar difficulties and agree that it's time to pack it in and start packing it in. "After this hole, we're done," sputters the Radiator. "A true fat man would never work this hard."

"Damn right," roars Hardware. "Why stand in the rain golfing when there's a clubhouse a thousand yards away with a TV and a free all-you-can-eat buffet?"

Laugeni empties a bag of M&Ms into his mouth and says, "You ready to get that pie at Pepe's?"

"Hell, no," says Hardy. "Let's head for the free buffet. Free is a major component of fat." Hardy and Laugeni bang bellies again like mating water beds and veer off the course toward the vittles.