

**D**uring the Cold War, the superpowers practiced a defense strategy called MAD—as in “mutually assured destruction.” They mounted an arms race based on the premise that if each side had the same number of nukes to guarantee instant annihilation in the event of a war, they wouldn’t dare attack the other.

Golf courses often engage in a similar exercise, with superintendents and club officials armed with ammunition designed to demolish each other. It’s called the blame game. While the stakes may not be the same as it was when Soviet weapons were pointed at New York, careers and credibility *do* hang in the balance.

Superintendents tend to blame *things*—the weather, the budget, the labor market, unrealistic expectations or government regulations. It sometimes seems to club officials that superintendents blame anything but themselves.

On the other hand, green committees, pros, general managers, owners and golfers blame people—and the most logical target is the superintendent.

When course conditions are in question, superintendents offer explanations that the unhappy folks in the clubhouse call excuses. The people who pay the annual dues seldom believe they share some of the responsibility when the heat is on. We all know the buck stops at the maintenance shop, but club officials often deal the hand a superintendent must play, as does Mother Nature.

Neither superintendents nor club officials can do anything about the weather, but a superintendent has to be careful how often he blames the weather for his problems. Like the boy who cried wolf, people will start to tune you out if you use the weather too often. Besides, once the sun comes out, everyone gets amnesia and they forget about the two weeks of clouds and rain.

But green committees need to understand enough agronomy to know that grass doesn’t grow well in the dark and under water. They must explain to complaining members that course conditions will improve.

Club officials and superintendents also

## No One Wins in the Blame Game

BY JOEL JACKSON



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often have heated debates about budgets. Superintendents should be able to document needs with facts and back them up with cost figures. Club officials need to accept the fact that if they make budget cuts across the board, they can't have the perfect conditions they crave. When you slash budgets, something has to give, either in the quality of materials purchased, the frequency of work done or the amount of labor available to do the work.

Ultimately, assigning blame shouldn't be the point of discussing course conditions—understanding the true nature of the problems and finding solutions is. While a superintendent may strive for perfection, that is an elusive and impossible goal. If you look hard enough, even the best courses in the world have flaws. The key is to get everyone, from club officials on down, to use the same criteria when judging whether a course is in tip-top shape.

One way to do that is for the club to agree to a set of written priorities for course conditions. This document should be a collaboration between the superintendent, club officials and influential golfers. Such an evaluation should include a realistic hole-by-hole assessment of the course. Once the priorities are set, everyone should have a copy. When everyone is on the same page, all parties will share in the responsibility for course conditions.

Spreading the burden of course conditioning to all those in authority at a course can help to avoid the conflict of assigning blame. Trust me: It's better to declare a truce now than to engage in the mutually destructive blame game.

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