

Word on the street is there's a dangerous game of chicken going on between some superintendents. It seems these superintendents, mostly from private clubs, are competing against each other to see whose course can have the fastest greens in town.

I've often heard superintendents say that they are their own worst enemies when it comes to the self-induced stress involved in managing and maintaining golf courses. But having an informal contest to see who can have the most suped-up greens is lunacy.

It's one thing to be a perfectionist when it comes to golf course maintenance — tidying up the course so splendidly that members can't find anything to complain about — and having to deal with the consequences in the form of pressure-packed expectations. But it's another thing to be foolish when it comes to golf course maintenance — playing Russian roulette with your greens — and having to deal with the consequences in the form of dead turf. The superintendents pushing their greens to the max for sake of speed and impressing members could end up getting themselves fired.

Tim Moraghan, director of championship agronomy for the USGA, says this foolish gamesmanship is happening more frequently in the industry than people think.

"Are superintendents under tremendous pressure from their memberships, or are they under tremendous pressure from their peers?" Moraghan asks.

Here's how this monkey business begins. Members of Club A, who are also members of Club B on the other side of town, play a round at Club B and conclude that the greens there are a half foot faster than the greens at Club A. A few days later, they play Club A and complain to the superintendent that the course's greens are too slow. In fact, they have the nerve to tell the superintendent that the greens at Club B were faster.

Well, superintendent of Club A takes the news personally. He gets it in his mind that he'll show the members — and the superintendent of Club B — who has the fastest greens in town. So he cuts them closer — twice a day —

This Game Is Fast, Furious and Foolish

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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and rolls them to boot. He does this even when the temperature soars into the 90s, and the humidity takes your breath away. The members hail him for his actions — and then they stab him in the back.

They return to Club B and tell the superintendent there that the greens at Club A make his course's greens look as slow as syrup running from a maple tree on a cool spring day. So what does the superintendent of Club B do? You guessed it.

It's a classic case of members playing the superintendent — not to mention a superintendent letting his ego get the best of him.

Not only are competing superintendents hurting themselves, they're hurting their peers, too. They're setting a precedent that calls for faster greens in general.

I hear a lot of superintendents talk about how members and golfers need to be educated to understand the agronomics of golf course maintenance, such as the stress placed on turf when greens are stimping as fast as a concrete sidewalk. The superintendents vying for the quickest greens in town have turned their backs on this responsibility.

Golf faces myriad problems these days — few new players, slow rounds, expensive green fees — all of which can be traced to the headaches created by fast greens. Why would superintendents want to contribute to this mess?

I've talked to many superintendents who cite green speed as a problem at their courses. They say golfers need to be educated to understand the problems that fast greens can cause.

But it seems that some superintendents have to educate themselves and their peers first.

What's that adage about responsibility?

Oh, yeah. "The buck stops here."

Editor Larry Aylward can be reached at 440-891-2770 or laylor@advanstar.com.