In Bounds: Plan B
By JOHN "JACK" MACKENZIE, CGCS
North Oaks Golf Club

Often asked, "What do you do during your free time Jack, play golf?" I pause and reflect before giving an answer.

Do I express that I don’t play much golf? That I really can’t justify another five or six hours upon a course where more than likely I have just spent ten hours? Or that I am into my vocation because I absolutely enjoy all of the challenging aspects of golf course management and my abilities to conquer those trials on a daily basis rather than my "love" for the game?

Nope, I simply state that when not at work I like to spend my free time at home doing household chores and projects.

For me working around and inside my home elicits a great sense of pride, particularly when you consider the skills I have developed are self-taught, almost inherent. My father, although a great wood dexterity than fixer-up talents.

Using rudimentary knowledge and considerable trial and error time, I have wired a basement, installed plumbing (including two toilets), hung sheetrock and taped, painted, papered, laid slate floors, built multiple decks and even set a rather incredible brick side walk.

Sound impressive? Well, to be honest it really isn’t because I have been blessed with a skill that many of you have as well. We have refined the talent called "Plan B."

"Plan B" is what you implement when "Plan A" doesn’t work the way it is supposed to typically due to situations seemingly beyond the individual’s control. Conditions such as a stripped bolt caused by poor manufacturing, wallpaper that fails, a cabinet is needed immediately for an impromptu Board Meeting? The Superintendent, of course!

With quick thinking the Superintendent reaches deep within himself and thinks "Plan B." He brings a trailer up to move the furniture expeditiously, plugs in the electronics, uses candle wax to slick a stuck drawer, looks on the dog’s collar, finds the owner’s phone number and gives them a call, and clips and pastes notes from previous Green Committee meetings onto a memo to be forwarded to the BOD. Having "Plan B" makes everything the Superintendent does easier.

It is said that all department heads at a golf club operation are formed from very different molds. Yet within each individual sector of the industry there lie distinct characteristics. General Managers are GMs, pros are pros, chefs are chefs and superintendents are superintendents.

I cannot comment on the other sectors, but I believe that in general superintendents are persistent, cunning, appreciative, retentive, demanding, educated and attentive. But perhaps their most important trait is the ability to implement "Plan B" at a moment’s notice because everyday is a "Plan B" day.

Whether at work or relaxing on a project at home, I am inherently aware of my abilities. Some tasks come easy and can be pulled off smooth as silk, while others require me to implement "Plan B," the most important tool in my tool box.