

## FEATURE ARTICLE I

Fred Behnke, CGCS, Mt. Prospect Golf Club



# The Best Defense is a Good Offense

*I was toe to toe with the guy and he wouldn't back off.*

"Choosing pin locations is MY responsibility as the host of this high school sectional tournament, and I plan to fulfill my obligations to the letter."

"Coach, I don't care what you think are your responsibilities. At this golf course the golf course maintenance staff does the course set-up for each and every event that is played here," I replied.

"Listen," he said, "I just want to make sure the course is presented in its best light."

"Yeah, and who made you Pope of this dump."

OK – OK, I didn't really say that last part, but I was thinking it. The first part of that dialogue did occur, has occurred in the past on several occasions, and probably will occur again. Why? What is it about certain golfers that compels them to horn in? I never see these people when its time to pump bunkers and shovel sand, but when "their" event is around the corner it's...

"So you gonna double cut the greens for us?"

"We need the bunker sand fluffier for Saturday's outing."

"Can we get three circles at ten foot intervals around the cup on seven?"

Shut Up!! – Shut Up!! – Shut Up!! Am I wrong? I have been a couple of time in the past – a long, long time ago when I didn't know any better, but am I wrong? Am I just being a curmudgeonly old greenskeeper?

The short answer in this day and age is – YES! Make golfers happy, maybe they'll come back. If a group is interested enough in a special need for their event to seek you out to make it happen, maybe just maybe, they can be accommodated and you'll make a friend. Which leads me to the real point of this article – The best defense is a good offense.

I'm reminded of a story I was told when I was just starting out BCD (before compact discs). Everybody starts with two pails – one for the white balls – you get a white ball for every time you're a good boy, and one pail for the black balls – you get a black ball when you're a bad boy. As the years go by and the balls start adding up, you'll find that your white ball pail has a

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*"...you get a white ball for every time you're a good boy..you get a black ball when you're a bad boy."*

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leak and those puppies gradually disappear, but that black ball pail is as tight as a drum. Every one of those suckers is still there, even the moldy, old ones. That guy whose round was ruined when he sculled a bunker shot out of a footprint thinks you can't maintain bunkers. The day you pulled carts after two inches of rain and ended up canceling the ladies nine-hole league outing will never be forgiven or forgotten. The pin that ended up too close to the slope on number seven is indelibly etched in somebody's brain. God forbid they ever get on the board. After twenty-five years at the same place I've accumulated a pail full of black balls, in fact, I'm on pail number two now. How can I still be here?

Job security is not a passive enterprise. The best defense is a good offense.

The Past-President's Council met recently. We donned our black robes, conducted the ritual sacrifices, and in the flickering candle light made grave and momentous observations on the state of our chapter. One particularly sobering topic of discussion pertained to ways our association can assist members in maintaining their employment during these troubled times. Let's face it. The days of wine and roses are long gone. Golf courses are closing their doors. New construction is at a standstill. People are reeling from the de-valuing of their IRA, 401K, home values, etc.

*(continued on next page)*

Several questions arose in the course of the discussion:

- 1) Should the MAGCS even concern itself with this issue?  
According to our Bylaws, the Purpose of the MAGCS (Article 1.2) makes no specific mention of the association's right or duty to provide "job retention" services. We have always been a semi-loose confederation of independent Lone Rangers. Put in your time, make some connections, work hard, study up, and with a little luck you'll land your first super job. The GCSAA and MAGCS will help you grow the grass and give you a chance to network with other supers to share war stories and what works and what doesn't. You got the job; it's your job to keep the job. But if you answer YES to question #1 we move on to:
- 2) To what degree is it appropriate or proper for the MAGCS to provide job retention support and services to its membership? There is a large group of dynamic, educated, and hungry young men and women out there lurking. They are ready, willing, and able to grab the brass ring, and they are also members of our association. They are the assistant superintendents, and if a grizzled veteran falls back from the herd shouldn't nature take its course? Let the devil take the hindmost. It's what keeps the species strong. Harsh, but they pay dues, too.
- 3) Golf Course Superintendents who have seen fit to advance the profession by participating in and supporting their professional associations have agreed to operate under a Code of Ethics, a gentlemen's agreement, if you will. In essence, this code of ethics (found immediately after the Bylaws of the association in your MAGCS directory and identical to the GCSAA Code of

Ethics) mandates that a member will accept and fully agree to abide by a series of statements that identify proper and professional behavior. It further goes on to provide "Professional Conduct Guidelines." These guidelines boil down to The Boy Scout's pledge (minus the God and Country stuff) – don't lie, steal or cheat, and be man or woman enough to operate in the light. Don't sneak around somebody's back. Back in the day, this behavior was expected. The threat of ostracism by your peers was enough to keep member golf course superintendents playing fair. Like I said before – it's a gentleman's agreement. Sadly those days are long gone.

Organizations exist that seek out the decision makers at your golf course to directly solicit support in replacing or absorbing the current golf course superintendent and maintenance personnel. Some of these organizations are actually members of the GCSAA and MAGCS. There is little interest on the national level in sanctioning these tactics, despite the fact that they fly in the face of the Professional Conduct Guidelines. It turns out that the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct are really just voluntary.

Now we come to the meat and potatoes of this message (finally).OK. Let's recap:

- Loose confederation of Lone Rangers.
- Plenty of able people just waiting for a chance.
- No rules.
- Sounds like a recipe for disaster unless ...
- Back to the Boy Scouts, except this time, their motto: Be Prepared.

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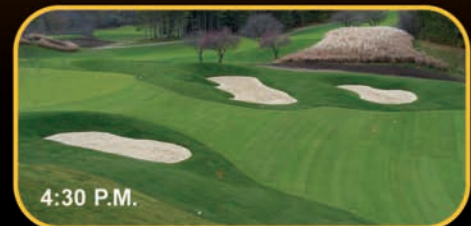
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You have been given notice that somebody's gone behind your back and is in your bosses' ear saying:

- 1) We can do it cheaper,
- 2) We can do it better, or some variation on that theme such as:
  - A) Utilizing a contractual maintenance agreement relieves the golf course of a lot of human relations/employment headaches: Paperwork, payroll taxes, worker compensation, unemployment insurance, etc., etc., etc. Or how about:
  - B) In the unlikely event that something is out of sorts, we have professional agronomists available at a moment's notice to swoop down and help your assigned staffer fix your turfgrass problems and get you good-to-go lickety split. Or:
  - C) Our buying power is enormous; we can get stuff for you for a lot less than you get it now. Or:
  - D) Your equipment fleet is excessive. We can come from off site with aerifiers and punch your greens in one day. Boom - in and out - and then we go away. Why keep the machines sitting around 90% of the time? If something on your course goes down, we can get a replacement piece in there the same day.

Compelling arguments – especially if the boss is unaware that:

- A) Your staff members are not numbers on a time card. They are reliable and competent workers who know the golf course in and out. They produce a product to your (super's) specifications that in turn came from the board or governing body of your golf course. In addition, you and your staff are loyal to your operation. You don't answer to someone else's bottom line.
- B) You, as a competent, active member of your professional association, have a network of peers with an incredible amount of "local knowledge" in fixing or better yet - anticipating problems and heading them off before they get out of hand. The USGA Green Section turf advisory service, the CDGA turfgrass staff and the Illinois Turf Foundation are wonderful and responsive aids to the individual superintendent.
- C) You have complete control of the types and composition of the consumables you acquire for your individual operation. You can tailor your plant protectants and fertilizers to your site's needs and idiosyncrasies. You are not limited by some purchase agreement made by someone in the home office, wherever that is.
- D) The maintenance equipment your course owns (or leases) is supported by a competitive and capable distributor that stands ready to get you whatever you need to keep things moving along smoothly. They rely on your business and will step up when the chips are down.

Pat Jones, a good friend of golf course superintendents everywhere, recently wrote an article suggesting that if you are satisfied with letting your work speak for itself, you are headed for a rude awakening. Get in the bosses' ear before they do. The best defense is a good offense. **-OC**

## ELIMINATE GUESSWORK WHEN SPRING FEEDING

**S**pring fertilization varies greatly on a number of factors. Cultural practices performed, soil amendments made, irrigation and drainage upgrades, fertilizers applied, and what happened last fall plays a significant role with this season's success. However, having a sound fertility program will provide you with your best chance of success for the upcoming season.

Typically, spring applications are applied after the early flush of shoot growth has occurred, but predicting spring weather can be a challenge when it comes to soil and air temperature, and precipitation. That's why choosing a fertilizer that performs in cool climates is so vital.

The nitrogen applied with UMAXX, a top performer in cool weather, is plant available as soon as watering in occurs. In addition, what the plant does not immediately use will be held onto the soil colloid as a reserve for future use.



**John Meyer**  
Regional Manager  
AGROTAIN International, LLC

This is a drastic change from other fertilizers.

Coated products are a great example of fertilizers that don't offer immediate plant nutrition and are subject to leaching once the protective coating breaks down.

Still other products rely on a process called mineralization, depending on soil microbes to break down nitrogen. Whereas soil microbes aren't fully active until the soil temperature reaches 55 degrees – which might not happen until late spring depending on the region – UMAXX begins working immediately and is not dependent on soil temperature for nitrogen release.

Although fine-tuning a spring fertilization program varies on many factors, its importance will be felt all summer long and even into the fall. The benefit of using an all-weather, long-lasting performer such as UMAXX provides immediate benefits, as well as a positive long-term impact. UMAXX gives the freedom to apply as a nitrogen component in a blend or part of a soluble fertilizer program. UMAXX offers consistent performance regardless of temperature or application type.

**For more information on UMAXX contact me at 952-334-6845 or [jmeyer@agrotain.com](mailto:jmeyer@agrotain.com)**

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