

EVENTS

CALENDAR

APRIL

21-22 40th Southeastern Turf-grass Conference, Tifton, GA. Contact Glenn Burton, Coastal Plain Experiment Station, Tifton, GA 31793. (912) 386-3353.

23-25 Landscape Industry Show, Long Beach Convention Center, Long Beach, CA. One of the largest trade shows in the landscape industry. Contact California Landscape Contractors Association, 2226 K Street, Sacramento, CA 95816, (916) 448-2522.

MAY

5-7 27th Turf & Landscape Institute, Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, CA. Contact Southern California Turfgrass Council, 2492 E. Mountain St., Pasadena, CA 91104, (818) 798-1715.

21 North Carolina Turf and Landscape Field Day, NCSU Turf Field Center, Raleigh, NC. Contact J.M. DiPaola, Box 7620, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695-7620, (919) 737-2657.

JUNE

8-11 National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics, Marriott Resort, Marco Island, FL. Contact Michael Cleary, NACDA, (216) 892-4000.

19 Fourth Annual Turf Field Day, Turf Seed, Inc., Research Center, Hubbard, OR. Contact Tom Stanley, Turf-Seed, Inc., P.O. Box 250, Hubbard, OR 97032.

26 Midwest Sports Turf Institute, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL. Presented by the Sports Turf Managers' Association. Contact Susan Benson, Business and Technical Institute, College of DuPage (312) 858-2800, ext. 2196.

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

TAKING A CHANCE ON PROGRESS



In the last few weeks I've taken part in three different sports turf clinics in Texas and California. Clearly the market has come a long way in a short time. Seminars have been packed. Both industry and turf extension have been highly supportive. Attendance at the seminars has been very strong. We are on the verge of greatly improving field conditions and safety.

The technology to make natural turf fields withstand heavy use exists now. The only things preventing fields from being updated is resistance to change and money.

One of the main reasons why the sports turf market has not kept up with available technology is a general disagreement among experts over field construction and maintenance methods. Many athletic field managers have been putting off important field changes because of this disagreement. I say we can't wait for these experts to agree, we have to take a chance on progress.

To wait until research has settled all disagreements could destroy much of the healthy momentum now in the market. First of all, it takes years to obtain funds for such research and then another two to five years to get reliable results. That research should definitely be initiated and pushed, but to freeze progress until this research is concluded is impractical and overlooks years of experience on the part of sports turf managers.

It's not as if applicable research doesn't already exist. There are basic areas of agreement to use as a starting point. These are adequate drainage, core aeration, proper mowing and fertilization, irrigation and a certain amount of annual renovation. Vast improvement is possible without a large investment just by making these few changes in a maintenance program.

However, better fields aren't free. The proper equipment to maintain them often costs more than the turf manager's spending authority. The right chemicals and seed are not so much alike that buying the cheapest ones will provide the same results. Additional labor is necessary if fields are to be properly maintained by crews. These are facts, not speculation.

Any athletic field manager is on solid ground if he asks for more money to correct a drainage or irrigation problem, to purchase an aerifier or mower, buy additional fertilizer, mow more frequently and renovate and overseed. These items will produce noticeable results for the investment. The results are more than appearance, they are playability, extended use, safety and team pride.

It's not so easy to stick your neck out for construction at this time. This is where most of the disagreement lies. Should a field be sand? If so, which of five to ten designs is best? Why do so many landscape architects and contractors know so little about sand-based athletic fields?

There are less expensive options to reconstruction that can be employed until the construction controversy is settled. Drainage can be improved in a variety of ways. Resodding does not mean the turf manager failed to do his job. Resodding periodically is standard even on the expensive sand based fields. Irrigation repair and improvement can be one of the best moves you can make without reconstruction.

One thing that has proven very beneficial to better sports turf at all levels has been including the purchasing manager in your plans. Invite him to attend a local sports turf seminar, take him to a turf field day and show him area fields that are properly funded. Explain to him the risks as well as the benefits. Pass along copies of **sportsTURF** magazine to him. Get him involved early. Don't fight the battle alone.

Sports fields are an asset to any physical plant and require periodic investment. Don't be afraid to speak out for clearly needed supplies. The number of people who will support you is growing daily. It's much safer today to take a chance on sports field improvement than it was just a year or two ago.

Bruce F. Shank