

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

PROTECT YOURSELF WITH THE RIGHT BID SPECIFICATIONS



Bidding is both the guardian and curse of public sports fields. The nightmares caused by bidding are as bad or worse than the few instances of graft and overpricing that have occurred without it. Today, bidding according to outdated or totally incorrect specifications is often a roadblock to field safety and a growing cause of liability lawsuits.

In a recent example, a state university branch in the Midwest advertised for bids on a new stadium football field. One contractor who obtained

the specifications in order to bid the job, recognized the components set for the rootzone soil mix. He checked his files and discovered the specifications for the football field's soil were exactly the same as the state highway department's roadside soil specifications. In other words, the job called for the same seedbed as a highway right-of-way. When he asked who had specified the job he was told a major, respected landscape architect.

Had these specifications actually been followed, the resulting turf would have lasted less than two seasons and would have given natural turf another undeserved, bad impression. No wonder some major universities specify artificial turf, the base is the same as a highway.

What if a promising athlete, who had already been signed to a National Football League franchise, suffered a crippling, permanent injury while playing on an improperly specified football field as a senior? Would the landscape architect be partly liable? Could the school and its insurance carrier protect themselves by requiring a landscape architect to consult a sports turf specialist or a national sports turf association for construction and maintenance guidelines?

Who is to say that an aggressive lawyer representing an injured athlete wouldn't also drag the sports turf manager struggling to maintain a poorly-built field into a lawsuit? How many fields in this country are lawsuits waiting to happen?

I can understand design faults with fields built 20 years ago. But, for fields under construction today, there is no excuse for not meeting current technological standards. Landscape architects who design sports fields without calling the local extension turf specialist, the Sports Turf Managers Association or the National Sports Turf Council deserve to be named in lawsuits for injuries caused on these fields. They are as negligent as a maintenance director who lets a field decline through inadequate or incorrect maintenance.

It's just a question of what takes place first, the development of field construction and maintenance standards or a rash of lawsuits which will result in major increases in liability insurance rates.

If I were a landscape architect involved with a sports field project, I wouldn't wait for someone else to develop standards and use old ones in the interim. I'd consider hiring someone with considerable experience as a sports field consultant to develop standards to protect my firm until one of the associations or the local extension service develops them for my area.

School and park superintendents who don't require an experienced individual to review specifications prior to construction, for fear of raising the cost of a field project, face the same exposure. Short cuts are too risky in today's sue-happy world. Sports fields must be treated with serious consideration from both construction and maintenance standpoints.

Until recognized standards are developed for all portions of the U.S., it is extremely important to seek and utilize the best available specifications. Persons who go by roadside specifications today are asking for serious problems. But, even worse, they hurt those in the market sincerely trying to provide the best and safest sports surfaces possible.

Bruce F. Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

AUGUST

14-15 Pennsylvania State University Turf Field Days, University Park, PA. Contact T.L. Watschke, 16 Tyson Building, University Park, PA 16802.

26-28 International Sport Summit, Hilton Hotel at Rockefeller Center, New York City, NY. Contact Sport Summit, 372 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10018. (212) 502-5306.

SEPTEMBER

11 Ohio Turfgrass Field Day, Turfgrass Research Facility, Columbus, OH. Contact the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation, (614) 422-2601.

20 Oklahoma Turfgrass Research Field Day, Turfgrass Research Center, Stillwater, OK. Contact Michael Kenna, extension turf specialist, Dept. of Horticulture, 335 Agricultural Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078. (405) 624-5404.

22-25 Northwest Turfgrass Conference, Red Lion Inn, Pasco, WA. Contact Dr. Roy Goss, Western Washington Research and Extension Center, Puyallup, WA 98371. (206) 593-8540.

27 Virginia Tech Turfgrass Research Field Days, Blacksburg, VA. Contact J. R. Hall, (703) 961-5797.

OCTOBER

6 Long Island Turf and Grounds Field Day, Huntington Crescent Club, Huntington, NY. Contact New York State Turfgrass Association, Inc., 210 Cartwright Blvd., Massapequa Park, NY 11762. (516) 541-6902.