

## DROUGHT IN SOUTHEAST STRAINS SPORTS FIELDS

Claps of thunder and dark clouds usually bring disappointment to sports turf managers across the Southeast in the spring. The prospect of cancelled events and rescheduling is usually unpleasant, but not this year. For more than two months, from mid-March to mid-May, no significant rainfall was recorded from northern Florida to North Carolina. The drought has been highlighted by major fires in North Carolina and spot fires in Georgia. Less than half the normal amount of rain has fallen in the Southeast this spring bringing the total to less than 13 inches.

"Facilities caught without irrigation are in real trouble," says Sam Newpher, grounds superintendent for the Atlanta Braves. "It's mainly schools and parks with some of the heaviest use fields. Depending on normal rainfall is just too risky when a field is used seven days a week. A high school in northern Georgia I helped this spring wanted to sprig its field without installing irrigation. The Booster Club was paying the bill so money wasn't a problem. Still the school administration was reluctant to accept responsibility for the new system. After changing the specifications to meet the school's demands, the irrigation was installed and the field sprigged. Had that system been left out, the sprigs would not have survived and the whole job would have been a waste. You're just wasting your money unless you put in irrigation."

"Many existing irrigation systems in this area have been designed more to augment natural rainfall than to replace it," Newpher points out. "At Fulton County Stadium, we've had to keep the water on much longer than normal and are hand watering more. Still we are able to see some gaps where the heads are not reaching uniformly. We have to be very careful to avoid wet spots while still getting enough water to the whole field."

Dick Hahne, track superintendent at Daytona International Speedway, Daytona Beach, FL, is concerned that his newly sprigged infield may not be as far along as he likes for the Firecracker 400 on Independence Day. He has been running his irrigation system up to 14 hours a day to keep the young sprigs growing in the sandy soil.

"I'm surprised there haven't been more restrictions placed on open field burning and water use," says Doug Moody, assistant director of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America based in Marietta, GA. "When I lived in New Jersey during its last two droughts, government agencies took the problem more seriously, restricting open burning, carwashes and irrigation. So far, the only restrictions in Georgia have been an even/odd day residential lawn watering restriction."

"New Jersey approached its drought from the standpoint that it would happen again," Moody explained. "It built additional reser-

voirs and developed policies for future water shortages. This year, New Jersey is better prepared than most states to handle a water crisis."

Moody, who represents more than 1,000 lawn care companies in the U.S. and Canada, says his industry has an opportunity to get involved in water problems by advising customers of drought-tolerant turfgrasses and the importance of built-in irrigation to quality lawn care.

"There is a lesson to be learned from the drought," says Newpher, "that hopefully won't be forgotten when the thunder claps again and the typical downpours return. There's too much at stake with valuable recreational turf to risk it to natural rainfall. It takes months to get a drought-stressed field back into safe condition. With the pressure on public sports facilities today, who can afford to lose the time?"

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Once a year the decision-makers of professional and amateur sports gather in New York City to confer on the *business* of sports. In three days in August, decisions will be made regarding new stadium construction, the cost of a 30-second spot during the upcoming Olympics and whether major television networks are going to cut back on coverage of college sports as they've hinted.

The Eighth Sport Summit will be held Aug. 26-28, at the New York Hilton in New York City. Speakers for the three-day event represent all major television networks, the Seoul Olympic Organizing Committee, the U.S. Olympic Committee, Major League Baseball, the National Football League, and the National Basketball Association. In addition, some of the marketing leaders in the sports business will describe their successes and failures.

A good look at the future will be presented; projects to be discussed include a roof for Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, MO, renovation of Denver's Mile High Stadium, a multipurpose arena in Miami, FL, final touches in Korea for the Olympics and new sports complexes at Auburn University and Michigan State University.

Architects, financiers, surface manufacturers, marketing agents, scoreboard manufacturers and team owners will be in New York City for the once-a-year event. Projects to be considered will range from the practical 10,000-seat arena for a college to the ultimate—the Olympics. Many of the same rules in design, financing, marketing and scheduling apply to all sports facilities despite the scale.

More information is available by contacting Sport Summit, 372 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10018 (212) 239-1061.

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