

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

GROWTH DEMANDS TRAINING FOR STADIUM MANAGERS



As the sod was being laid this past May to complete construction of Joe Robbie Stadium, the new home of the Miami Dolphins, the stadium still did not have a sports turf manager. Negotiations with a turf manager from another National Football League stadium had broken down and there was only three months to go before the Dolphins first exhibition game. It became quite clear to the Dolphins that finding a qualified manager for a professional stadium was not easy.

Fortunately, with the help of Dr. Bill Daniel, whose Prescription Athletic Turf system field graced the NFL's newest stadium, and Harry

Gill, grounds superintendent at Milwaukee County Stadium, the Dolphins found Dean Kuykendahl. He was the field manager at Lewis University in Romeoville, IL, a small university that doesn't even have a varsity football program.

Kuykendahl is a fighter—someone who pushes for what he wants. He knew virtually nothing about sports turf management when he took the job at Lewis three years before. But that didn't stop him. Lewis puts its athletic energy into its Division 2 National Collegiate Athletic Association baseball program. The first thing Kuykendahl did was decide to make Lewis's varsity field the best in the conference. He started calling universities for help with the field. His search led him to Daniel who was still teaching at Purdue University in Lafayette, IN. Daniel provided Kuykendahl with reams of information on baseball field care and told him to get in touch with Gill at Milwaukee County Stadium.

Without hesitation, Gill invited Kuykendahl to come to Milwaukee and see how he prepared the field for the Brewers. "Pops" Gill took him under his wing, as he has many other aspiring stadium field managers in the past, and gave Kuykendahl probably the best "on-the-job" training available today. The drive between Romeoville and Milwaukee became a regular trek for Kuykendahl.

The extra effort paid off. Kuykendahl asked for and received sizeable budget increases for his program at Lewis. The baseball team started bragging about their field and the athletic department backed him with the administration for improvements in the softball and soccer fields on campus.

Working those few games in Milwaukee, however, had given Kuykendahl "stadium fever." He wanted to go all the way to the top, whether that was a Division 1 university or a professional baseball or football team. He kept in touch with Gill and Daniel on a regular basis. His dream came true this June when the Dolphins put him in charge of the field at Joe Robbie Stadium.

Kuykendahl worked hard to get his break and beat incredible odds to get the job he did. That is wonderful for him, but not so wonderful for the industry in general.

A training program for future stadium field managers needs to be developed as soon as possible. The demand for experienced field managers exceeds the ability of Harry Gill or George Toma at the Kansas City Royals to individually train all candidates for future stadium positions. Furthermore, on-the-job training needs to be backed up with at least a two-year education in turfgrass management. Up to this point, golf course superintendents and turf management students have had to learn special stadium techniques from Gill and Toma. Field managers, on the other hand, frequently lack important general turf management knowledge. They need both to succeed in the long run. Both Gill and Toma spend hours on the phone with turf experts making sure they consider all the angles of turf management when there is a problem.

Stadium field managers today must know both turf management and field preparation techniques. A two-part educational program has to be established to train the stadium managers of the future. These "complete" candidates will then be available when a stadium needs a turf manager. The last minute scramble will hopefully then become a thing of the past.

Bruce F. Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

OCTOBER

28-29 Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium, Pfister Hotel, Milwaukee, WI. Contact: Bob Welch, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, 735 North Water St., Milwaukee, WI 53202, (414) 225-2222

NOVEMBER

2-4 Kansas Turfgrass Conference, Ramada Inn, Wichita, KS. Contact Larry Leuthold, extension horticulturist, Kansas State University, Waters Hall, Manhattan, KS 66506, (913) 532-6170.

3-6 New York State Turfgrass Association Convention, Rochester Riverside Convention Center, Rochester, NY. Contact: Elizabeth Seme, executive director, NYSTA, PO Box 612, Latham, NY 12110, (518)783-1229.

8-11 Green Team Conference and Trade Show, Hyatt, Crystal City, VA. Sponsored jointly by ALCA and PGMS. Contact Professional Grounds Management Society, 12 Galloway Ave., Suite 1-E, Cockeysville, MD 21030, (301) 667-1833.

9-11 Penn State Golf Turf Conference, Keller Conference Center, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA. Contact: Dr. Joseph Duich, Dept. of Agronomy, 21 Tyson Building, University Park, PA 16802, (814) 865-9853.

DECEMBER

7-10 Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show '87, Ohio Center, Columbus, OH. Contact: Ohio Turfgrass Foundation, 2021 Coffey Rd., Columbus, OH 43210, 614-292-2601.