

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE



U.S. STRATEGY NEEDED NOW FOR NEXT CENTURY

If one thing is holding back the golf and sports turf industries in this country, it is the lack of a national plan. No community, much less an entire country, can operate effectively without goals and a strategy on how to reach them.

Operating without a plan is like driving in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles or any other big city without a map. Why take crowded streets when a highway can get you there faster? Time is money, as the saying goes, and that definitely applies to golf. In the case of sports fields, lost time means more unnecessary injuries.

Two recent developments point clearly to the need for a national strategy. The first is a study sponsored by the National Golf Foundation (NGF) revealing that 4,000 to 6,000 golf courses must be built in the next 12 years to keep up with the demand for golf.

The NGF estimates that by the turn of the century more than 30 million golfers will be seeking starting times on the nation's golf courses. The present 12,407 courses will not be able to handle the load.

The NGF should be commended for setting a national goal of 16,000 to 18,000 golf courses by the year 2000. If you break that number down, you quickly realize that 375 new courses must be opened each year for the next 12 years. That's more than three times the number of golf courses opened in 1987. Yet, it can be done, says NGF, reminding us that during the 1920s an average of 450 golf courses were built each year.

The second development is a report by the Scottish Sports Council (SSC) which predicts how many more sports facilities will be required by the country to take it into the 21st Century. Titled "Sport 2000: A Scottish Strategy," the report is based on the fact that more than 90 percent of Scottish youth and 50 percent of Scottish adults take part in some form of sport or physical recreation. It concludes that, to meet the demand for recreation likely by the year 2000, the country needs to spend 350 million pounds in capital improvements and hire an additional 2,750 management and operational personnel.

According to SSC, the country needs just one more 18-hole golf course, but also 1,000 more tennis courts; 13 additional track and field complexes; and 41 more "pitches." Plus, 750 of its current 4,000 playing fields should be upgraded. If Parliament accepts the SSC's report and funds the request, Scotland should be in good sports shape in 12 years.

Think how different our situation is. Even with NGF's guidelines, golf course construction is mostly in the hands of private enterprise. Municipal golf courses can't pick up all the slack.

We don't even have rough numbers to estimate the need for other types of sports turf facilities. No U.S. Sports Council exists to gather the necessary information from parks, schools, colleges, municipalities, and private recreational facilities. It would appear at the moment that money to fund such a study is not readily available from either public or private sources.

We have no national strategy, and in many cases, no local strategy to guide us in the future. The country is dealing with the need for more sports facilities on a piecemeal basis.

I'm not suggesting we ask government to pick up the tab as in Scotland. But we do need some accounting of current facilities, and a national strategy to help guide public and private institutions into the next century.

It seems to me that if the NGF found the resources to commission its study of golf courses, a consortium of other industry associations can find a way to commission a study on other types of sports facilities. The longer we wait, the less prepared we'll be.

Bruce Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

DECEMBER

5-8 New Jersey Turfgrass Expo '88, Resorts International Hotel, Atlantic City, NJ. Contact: Dr. Henry Indyk, (201) 932-9453.

6 Symposium on the Characteristics and Safety of Playing Surfaces for Field Sports, Sheraton Phoenix, Phoenix, AZ. Contact: Kathy Dickinson, ASTM, 1916 Race St., Philadelphia, PA 19103, (215) 299-5480.

6-9 Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show, Cincinnati Convention Center, Cincinnati, OH. Contact: Ohio Turfgrass Foundation, 2021 Coffey Rd., Columbus, OH 43210, (614) 292-2047.

12-14 Georgia Turfgrass Conference, Radisson Inn and Conference Center, Atlanta, GA. Contact: Gil Landry, Extension Turf Specialist, The University of Georgia, College of Agriculture, Athens, GA 30602, (404) 542-5350.

12-14 Texas Turfgrass Association Conference and Show, Fort Worth, TX. Contact: Shirley Duple, TTA, 1003 Howe, College Station, TX 77840, (409) 693-1656.

12-14 Missouri Lawn and Turf Conference, Clarion Hotel, St. Louis, MO. Contact: Terry Anne Turner, Conference Office, 344 Hearn Center, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211, (314) 882-4087.

14-16 Desert Turfgrass/Landscape Conference and Show, Tropicana Resort, Las Vegas, NV. Contact: Bob Morris, Clark County Ext. Office, 953 E. Sahara Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89104, (702) 731-3130.