

# THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

## CONSTRUCTION OUTLOOK BRIGHT FOR '90S



**W**atch out golf course industry, the athletic field market is going to make your boom look like a golf ball next to a soccer ball, at least in terms of the number of new facilities planned.

The number of golf courses on the drawing boards is well-known, thanks to the National Golf Foundation. According to the NGF, between 300 and 400 golf courses will be constructed each year for the rest of the decade if the golf industry is to meet the needs of this country's growing golfer population.

Unfortunately, there is no group like the NGF for the athletic field industry. The market consists of a number of different sports provided by many different types of institutions: the big three being colleges and universities, parks, and high schools. Organizations, representing either the sports or the institutions, have yet to calculate the total number of fields in their category.

However, a national business publication has surveyed its readers who manage recreational facilities in order to project the growth of the sports industry over the next three years. By taking its data for all types of recreational facilities and breaking out just the figures for athletic fields, we can get a rough (and probably conservative) estimate of the number of athletic fields currently planned.

The resulting figure is approximately 18,000 new (not renovated) softball, baseball, football and soccer fields and outdoor tracks to be constructed over the next three years. More than half of this construction will take place at high schools across the country as enrollments start to rise again after a lull in growth during the 1980s. Forty percent of these facilities will be for baseball and softball and 25 percent will be for football (stadium and practice). Soccer represents about ten percent of construction planned by high schools.

Park districts will be building more than 4,000 new fields in the next three years. Again, baseball and softball lead the type of sports facilities planned by almost two-thirds. However, soccer jumps into second place with about 25 percent of new construction.

Colleges and universities are planning to build over 3,500 new fields. One out of six of these fields will be for soccer, one out of five will be football stadium or practice fields, and four out of ten will be used for baseball or softball.

The survey paints a bright picture for the sports turf industry in the 1990s. The second wave of the post-war baby boom will hit this decade, regardless of the state of the economy. Participation in sports has begun to climb steadily at the high school level. It will spread quickly to the college and university level. Furthermore, this generation will be seeking personal fitness as well as recreation. Its involvement in sports will extend into adulthood placing an unceasing demand on parks, golf courses, and health clubs.

It is imperative that industry professionals get the point across that only properly constructed, well maintained sports facilities are safe and durable. Too many athletic facilities were improperly constructed and inadequately maintained in the past. There is no reason to make the same mistake during the '90s.

High schools, parks, and colleges must hire qualified contractors to build their fields and employ trained sports turf managers to maintain them. They must invest in skilled personnel, efficient equipment, and supplies to protect their investment and insure the safety of athletes and the environment. Finally, they must recognize sports turf managers as professionals and delegate responsibility for decision-making to them.

From all indications, the sports turf and golf course industries will shine in the '90s. While other industries may be in decline, ours will be growing steadily. The proof is in the numbers.

*Bruce F. Shenk*

# EVENTS

CALENDAR

## SEPTEMBER

**30-3** Florida Turfgrass Association Annual Conference and Show, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, FL. Contact: FTA, Inc., 302 S. Graham Avenue, Orlando, FL 32803-6332, (407) 898-6721.

## OCTOBER

**3-4** 30th Annual Southern California Turfgrass Expo, Orange Country Fairgrounds, Costa Mesa, CA. Contact: SCTC, (714) 951-8547.

**21-24** National Institute on Park and Grounds Management Annual Educational Conference, Reno, NV. Contact: NIPGM, P.O. Box 1936, Appleton, WI 54913, (414) 733-2301.

## NOVEMBER

**5** Guelph Turfgrass Institute Third Annual Symposium. Royal Canadian Legion, Guelph, Ontario. Contact: Mira Soni, Div. of Continuing Education, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada, N1G 2W1, (519) 824-4120.

**12-14** Penn State Golf Turf Conference, Keller Conference Center, University Park, PA. Contact: Dr. Joseph Duich, Dept. of Agronomy, 119 Tyson Bldg., University Park, PA 16802, (814) 865-9853.

**13-16** New York Turf and Grounds Exposition, Rochester Riverside Convention Center, Rochester, NY. Contact: New York State Turfgrass Association, P.O. Box 612, Latham, NY 12110, (518) 783-1229.

**28-30** Golf Course Europe '90, Parc des Expositions du Bourget, Paris, France. Contact: Expoconsult, Industrierweg 54, Postbus 200, 3600 AE Maarssen, Holland. Telephone: 03465 73777, Fax: 03465 73811.

## DECEMBER

**4-6** North Central Turfgrass Exposition, Ramada Renaissance Hotel and Prairie Convention Center, Springfield, IL. Contact: Illinois Turfgrass Foundation, (312) 644-0828.

**10-13** Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show, Cincinnati Convention Center, Cincinnati, OH. Contact: John R. Street, Ohio Turfgrass Foundation, 2021 Coffey Rd., Columbus, OH 43210, (614) 292-2601.

Send announcements on your events two months in advance to editor, *Golf & SportsTURF*, P.O. Box 8420, Van Nuys, CA 91409. Fax: (818) 781-8517.