

STMA Fall Field Of The Year: Porter Guides Bobcat Field To Excellence

Bobcat Stadium graces the campus of Southwest Texas State University, in San Marcos, TX. It's a convenient site, located 30 miles from Austin and 60 miles from San Antonio.

The stadium serves as home field for the university's Bobcat football team. It's also the home field for San Marcos High School. It hosts about five state high school football play-off games each year. Five major track meets are held at Bobcat Stadium annually. At the end of March, it was filled with the hustle and bustle of a Special Olympics weekend. Bobcat Stadium is also the temporary home field for the World Football League's San Antonio Riders. (The Riders will be playing in the new San Antonio Alamo Dome next year.)

This active schedule keeps things hopping for STMA member, Randy Porter, SWTSU's manager of grounds and horticulture.

Coordinating the football field use for college and high school level teams is always a challenge. The high school teams usually play on a Friday night, followed on Saturday afternoon by the college game. The turf gets a heavy workout with this one-two punch, even when weather conditions are ideal. Add a heavy rain, drought, or drying winds, and problem solving gets a bit more intense.

Track meets put a different kind of stress on turf. There are running events, usually confined to the track surface; and jumping events, throwing events, and active spectator groups, which are everywhere but the track surface. These activities occur in the spring when Texas grasses are making the cool sea-

son/warm season transition.

If it all sounds like a build-up to an excuse for poor field conditions, think again. Bobcat Stadium is the Sports Turf Managers Association Football Field of the Year.

STMA has developed the award, which it plans to present annually, to honor the facility that rates highest in field condition and overall management. Bobcat Stadium is the first field to receive this award.

Plenty Of Ground To Cover

The university's total campus covers 350 acres. Says Porter, "Our department maintains between 150 and 175 acres. We have 100 acres under irrigation. Besides the turf, we plant and care for all the trees, shrubs and flower beds. We're involved with a number of other matters that relate to grounds care and maintenance, too. For example, we're even in the garbage business. We empty 300 litter containers every day."

There are no revolving doors at Bobcat Stadium. It just seems that way because of the seemingly constant stream of events held there.

Twenty-five acres of university property are devoted to sports turf. Besides the football and track facilities of Bobcat Stadium, there are mens' baseball fields, womens' softball fields, a football practice facility and 12 acres of intramural fields. With a student body of 21,000, these fields get quite a workout.

Student activity levels are rising at SWTSU, as on most campuses. Besides organized sports, the number of informal activities, like pick-up games, frisbee throwing, jogging, biking and walking, are steadily growing. As use increases, so do maintenance demands.

In the grounds and horticulture department, Porter has a full-time staff of 35, and an additional 10 seasonal, part-time employees during the busiest seasons. These part-time workers are usually students. Of this staff, five full-time and seven part-time employees are assigned to the athletic department. The work at Bobcat Stadium itself is handled by one of the full-time and three part-time athletic department personnel.

"Even though we work with around 175 acres of property, and sports turf is only 25 acres of that total, the sports fields are the most challenging," says Porter. "Other high-profile areas that require a great deal of time and attention are the President's house and the academic mall, a student gathering spot."

"We follow a monthly maintenance schedule for the football field, which includes aerifying, fertilization, top dressing and weed control. Fire ants are the only insect problem we have here. We bait three times a year to control them."

"Our athletic fields are all bermuda. We oversee all of the fields with ryegrass

in the fall, using annual rye for everything but the stadium. We've chosen to use perennial rye on the stadium because it takes hold quickly and is longer lasting. Even though the cost of perennial rye is five times greater than annual rye, because of the extensive use of that field during the spring and fall seasons, it's worth the price."

"An underground drainage system at the stadium helps keep the field in top shape for play, even when the weather is less than cooperative," says Porter.

Turf care equipment used for football field maintenance includes a Toro Turf-Pro mower, Ryan aerifier and Jacobsen turf sweeper. A John Deere 950 tractor gets a steady workout pulling equipment such as a top dresser, fertilizer spread-



Application of Bobcat logo from start to finish.



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er and the 100 gallon sprayer used for weed control. According to Porter, two John Deere AMTs have proven to be excellent time and energy savers.

Up To The Task

Working with a wide variety of sports programs, the demands of an active campus, and a good-size staff can be daunting. It requires all of Porter's considerable talents.

He brings a combination of academic training and hands-on experience to his position. He was hired by the university 14 years ago as a grounds keeper, mainly mowing turf. To advance his education, he moved into a part-

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time position as draftsman on the irrigation systems. Porter now holds a bachelor's degree in Industrial Arts and a master's in Applied Geography/Environmental Management, both from Southwest Texas State University.

In 1984, Porter returned to full-time work in the athletic department as supervisor of athletics and irrigation. And, as he says, "Things just evolved from there." After seven years as supervisor

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of athletics and irrigation, he moved to his current position, manager of grounds and horticulture.

It's important for Porter to keep abreast of industry advancements and continually upgrade both his professionalism and that of his staff. An article about Sports Turf Managers Association and its programs caught his eye in 1987.

"I thought STMA sounded like an organization that was headed in the direction I wanted to go, especially with its emphasis on professionalism, and I joined in 1987," he recalls. "The relationship has been even more beneficial than I anticipated. I've especially enjoyed the opportunity to talk with others, to exchange ideas and to pick up professional tips."

Porter has attended the last two STMA national meetings, which were held in Houston and San Diego. "The meetings were packed with practical, useful information," he says. "The tour of Jack Murphy Stadium with hands-on information, was especially enlightening."

The sports field program at SWTSU has long been an intensive one. Besides upkeep and general maintenance, the program has included renovation and construction.

Says Porter, "In the years that I've been with the university, we've been able to handle most of the field construction in-house."

Field quality has been, and continues to be, a prime concern. That high quality has attracted the pros. Besides the current relationship with the San Antonio Riders, for several years, the Houston Oilers football team held their summer training camp at SWTSU, utilizing the football practice facilities at Bobcat Stadium.

Being the 1992 home field for the Riders has some interesting benefits.

"We're pleased that the San Antonio Riders have chosen our facility," says Porter. "Several of the World Football League games will be shown on television. Bobcat Stadium will get national exposure on two network games and three or four cable channel games. We're excited about the positive effects that exposure will have, not only for our sports turf program, but for the university as a whole."

Of course, Porter and his staff won't be standing around taking bows for the camera. They'll be busy behind the scenes as usual, upholding that quality image that made Bobcat Stadium the STMA Football Field of the Year. □

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Send the information below to enter:

1. Age of baseball diamond (year of installation).
2. Geographic location (city and state).
3. Description of maintenance program.
4. Operating budget for baseball diamond.
5. Irrigation: None _____ Manual _____ Automatic _____
6. Total number of maintenance staff for field.
7. Does baseball field have lighting for night games?
8. Number of events on baseball diamond per year.
9. Types and number of events on diamond other than baseball?
10. How many months during the year is the field used?
11. Why you think this field is one of the best?
12. **IMPORTANT:** Send two sets of color slides or prints.

Deadline for entries: Entries must be postmarked no later than November 30, 1992. Selection of winners will be made by the Awards Committee of Four Major League Head Groundskeepers.

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