

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

WAKE-UP CALL



To National Football League franchises and professional sports venues around the country, this could be your wake-up call:

On March 13, 1992, Kenneth Silver, attorney for former Detroit Lions guard Mike Utley, sent a letter to the Pontiac (MI) Silverdome's Stadium Building Authority. The letter charged that the "dangerous and defective condition which substantially caused Mr. Utley's injury is located on the football field of the Silverdome."

Utley, you'll recall, was paralyzed from the chest down as the result of an injury sustained during a November 17 game against the Los Angeles Rams. As of this writing, no suit has been filed by Silver on Utley's behalf and Silver will not comment on the case.

The Silverdome, as you may also recall, has an artificial surface, but this isn't an indictment of artificial surfaces. This isn't about "winning" in court or out—there is no real victory for Utley. No amount of money can replace what he lost. This isn't about liability or legal ramifications.

It's about *priorities*, and why sports turf management isn't higher up on the list. Why is it that an NFL franchise will shell out millions for a top athlete, but sports venues, whether owned by the franchise or not, frequently balk at paying a decent salary to one of *the* key people in protecting the player investment, the sports turf manager? Why is it that a professional sports stadium will spend close to \$1 million on a new field, and then drag its feet buying equipment to preserve it?

The answer is that the sports turf industry falls near the bottom of the priority list at levels of athletics. Utley's spinal injury was a rarity for the NFL. Tragically, such injuries are not so unusual at the high school level. How many of those are caused by poor field conditions? If one is the answer, isn't that enough?

At all levels, the most common excuse for dangerous playing conditions is inadequate funding. However, given the current liability trends, how can anyone afford *not* to have a safe field?

I don't know if the artificial field at the Silverdome was unsafe—nobody does at this point. I do know that it's time to get sports turf management higher up on the priority list at all levels. It's time to "make some noise."

At the very least, we owe it to Mike Utley.



Matthew Trulio

EVENTS

CALENDAR

JUNE

8-9 National Golf Foundation Comprehensive Seminar, Falls Church, VA, Contact: Roger Yaffe (407) 744-6006

15-16 Golf Course Design Course and Workshop, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Contact: Office of Development and External Relations, GSD, Harvard University, (617) 495-4315, fax (617) 495-5967.

17 Golf Course Development Course and Workshop, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Contact: Office of Development and External Relations, GSD, Harvard University, (617) 495-4315, fax (617) 495-5967.

17-18 Midwest Grounds Management Conference, Midwest Association of Physical Plant Administrators and the Professional Grounds Management Society, Miami University, Oxford, OH, Contact: PGMS, 10402 Ridgland Rd., Ste. 4, Cockeysville, MD, 21030 (301) 667-1833.

18 Golf/Residential Site Planning Course and Workshop, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Contact: Office of Development and External Affairs, GSD, Harvard University, (617) 495-4315, fax (617) 495-5967.

18-19 Golf Clubhouse Design and Site Planning Course and Workshop, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Contact: Office of Development and External Relations, GSD, Harvard University, (617) 495-4315, fax (617) 495-5967.

22-23 Golf Course Design Course and Workshop, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Contact: Office of Development and External Relations, GSD, Harvard University, (617) 495-4315, fax (617) 495-5967.

24-25 Resort Development, Planning and Design Course and Workshop, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Contact: Office of Development and External Relations, GSD, Harvard University, (617) 495-4315, fax (617) 495-5967.

Send announcements on your events two months in advance to editor, sportsTURF magazine, P.O. Box 8420, Van Nuys, CA 91409 or FAX to (818) 781-8517.

Note: In the April issue of *sportsTURF* a photo of an Aer Way aerator from Holland Equipment was incorrectly captioned as "PTO-driven." The unit is ground-driven.