Desert Gridiron Gets Maximum Exposure

Last month in the STMA news section of sportsTURF, we listed the organization’s award-winning athletic fields for 1992. Those honors were presented at the STMA Conference and Exhibit in Indianapolis last December. The STMA award for the year’s best gridiron, however, was inadvertently left off the list in the magazine. That was our mistake, one we regret deeply.

The University of Arizona in Tucson received the 1992 STMA Football Field of the Year Award. Although Chuck Raetzman, assistant director of Operations Services Department/Facilities Management Division, actually accepted the award in Indianapolis, he is quick to credit the field’s superb crew.

“It’s just a team effort,” he says. “I don’t think you can point to any one person. Our success is the result of a combined effort of members within the grounds department.”

Recognition for those often unrecognized — namely sports turf managers — is vital, both for the individuals honored and the profession itself. The individuals are acknowledged for a job well done — sometimes, that’s their only significant reward. Sports turf management profits from the exposure because such awards bring the under-acknowledged profession into the public spotlight.

Case in point: The Copper Bowl was held at the University of Arizona on December 29 and televised nationally by ESPN. Moments before the opening kickoff, it was announced over the stadium’s public address system that the gridiron had won the Football Field of the Year Award sponsored by the Sports Turf Managers Association.

“Apparently the crowd, about 43,000 or 44,000 people, was listening, and they really responded to it with a loud ovation,” says Raetzman with a touch of incredulity. “It kind of surprised me.”

That kind of attention and publicity is priceless, much like when NFL turf consultant George Toma is shown plying his trade on national television while high-profile commentators like John Madden praise him. Both do more good for the profession than a hundred issues of this magazine. Sports turf management excellence cannot get enough public exposure.

Most of the fans at the University of Arizona that day probably hadn’t even considered the effort that went into the field. Most certainly had never heard of the STMA. And yet, when it was pointed out to them, they applauded and, what’s more, they appreciated a job well-done and the professionals who did it. The public isn’t blind — it just needs a nudge now and then.

Matthew Trulio