

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

Changing Attitudes, Pursuing Solutions



A friend of mine “plays” league softball two nights a week. I emphasize the word “plays” because, to be honest, I don’t think he has much fun at it, and there’s supposed to be a causal relationship between the two, as in, “If you play, then you have fun.”

Not for my friend. He approaches each softball night like it’s Game 7 of the World Series, as if the future of his wife and children rest on every swing of his bat. Losing sends him into a two-day funk.

“I play to win,” he tells me. “I’m competitive.”

“You *work* to win,” I tell him. “You’re unbalanced.”

He usually laughs at that, if his team won the night before.

A few weeks back we went mountain biking. He showed up at the trail head on his bike, his right leg decorated by an assortment of day-old scrapes and bruises. I asked him what happened.

“Dove for one in right field last night,” he said “It’s like rock out there.”

During the ride, we got onto the subject of field maintenance, what it costs, and the effects of budget cutting. I launched into my well-worn speech on the correlation between poor field maintenance and injuries, but before I could really get rolling, he cut me off.

“Gotta make budget cuts somewhere,” he snapped. “It’s not like we’re the Los Angeles Dodgers, I mean, we don’t need a field like theirs anyway.”

I was stunned. Here was a rabid, certifiable softball lunatic, with a field-induced injury looking like something out of a Stephen King novel, telling me field quality was low on his twisted list of priorities. He’d sell his soul to win games, but when it comes to adequate surfaces on which to play them, he’d rather give blood.

That’s a tough attitude to change — you can present the facts and figures with all the logic and rhetorical brilliance you please, and most of the time you’ll still get, “Gotta make budget cuts somewhere.”

Despite what often amounts to an exercise in futility, attempting to inform the unenlightened is a worthwhile pursuit. However, it might be more effective to balance our attempts to change attitudes, with finding ways to *get around them*.

That’s well-known territory for Scott Gaunky, grounds foreman of Mundelein High School. Gaunky inherited a baseball diamond in pathetic shape. He walked right into a “Sorry, but we gotta make budget cuts somewhere” situation, which would have doomed the field to yet another season of inadequacy.

That didn’t deter Gaunky, who applied a combination of creative thinking and hard work to make the rebuilding of the field into a *community effort*. The story begins on page 14, and I urge you to read it — it is among the most valuable articles we have printed.

Today, the Mundelein High Mustangs play on one of the finest baseball diamonds in the region. I think they even manage to have some fun, unlike my softball fanatic friend.

Matthew Trulio

EVENTS

CALENDAR

JULY

23 STMA Southern California Institute, San Diego Jack Murphy Stadium. Contact: Chris Bunnell at (619) 432-2421 or (619) 945-8518.

AUGUST

5 National Turfgrass Evaluation Program turfgrass research field day. Beltsville Agricultural Research Center-West, Beltsville, MD. Contact: Kevin Morris or Jennatte Wills (301) 504-2125.

17 Wisconsin Turfgrass Field Day. O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility, Madison, WI. Contact: Dr. Frank Rossi (608) 262-1490.

SEPTEMBER

14-15 Southeastern North Carolina Professional Turfgrass Conference. Wrightsville Beach Holiday Inn, Wilmington, NC. Contact: Dr. Bruce Williams (919) 253-4425.

26-29 Florida Turfgrass Association’s 41st annual conference and show. Tampa Convention Center, Tampa, FL. Contact: FTGA (800) 882-6721.

NOVEMBER

1-3 National Institute on Park and Grounds Management annual educational conference. Sheraton Denver Tech Center, Denver, CO. Contact: National Institute (414) 733-2301.

15-18 Green Industry Expo ‘93. Baltimore Convention Center, Baltimore, MD. Contact: Green Industry Expo Management (404) 973-2019.

16-18 Penn State Golf Turf Conference. Nittany Lion Inn, University Park, PA. Contact: Peter Landschoot (814) 863-1017.



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