Making Connections

Take all the magazines published in this country, from Time to the Atlantic Monthly, from People to U.S. News & World Report and stack them in a pile. Then walk away for awhile. When you return, Sports Illustrated will have risen to the top of the heap.

Forget Sports Illustrated's impeccable writing — lots of magazines have terrific writing, although few, from both technical, mechanical, and creative perspectives compare with SI. Forget dazzling photography and layout — lots of photographers and art directors have an eye for remarkable moments, although few capture and present them with SI's consistency.

The true brilliance of Sports Illustrated is its absolutely thorough coverage, not just of "sports," but of everything sports-related.

Take the August 16, 1993, issue of SI. Beyond baseball's pennant races, the NFL preseason, and Pete Rose's quest for redemption, the magazine included two articles that were applicable to sports turf, which is, after all, an integral element of the topic it covers. The issue's "Point After" piece lamented the imminent loss of Durham Athletic Park to a new facility. The other article, called "Triumph of the Swoosh," chronicled the ascendancy of Nike, the shoe manufacturing and marketing giant.

The article on Durham Athletic Park was entertaining, worthwhile reading; however, I believe the article on Nike should be mandatory reading for those interested in the progress and growth of the sports turf industry.

Why? What does the phenomenal success of an athletic shoe company have to do with sports turf? It's not "the shoes," but how the shoes were packaged and sold.

Who ever considered, much less cared, about athletic shoes 20 or so years ago? The majority of the NBA's finest used to lace up footwear that provided little ankle support and even less cushion. Today's athletes, from pros to high school, wouldn't take a chance walking down the street in pair of yesterday's "athletic" shoes, much less play a game in them.

What athletic shoe companies tried to do, but Nike did best, was tie its products to athletic performance. The company connected shoes, something nobody seemed to really care about for decades (beyond cleats for baseball and football and rubber-soled "high tops" for basketball), to athletic excellence.

That isn't to say Nike didn't develop superb products — by all accounts, other than those from some of its competitors, it did. But the best product in the world will "sell" poorly without promotion and marketing. Nike made its product synonymous with athletic performance and in doing so raised the athletic and non-athletic public's awareness of the real or perceived contribution of shoes to that performance.

Like athletic footwear, natural sports turf is a product, and at this point one somewhat unappreciated one by the sporting public. The greater the connection we make between sports turf excellence and athletic performance and safety, like Nike did with shoes, the greater its real or perceived value will become. Bo may never "know" ryegrass, but the public will eventually know and value a superior athletic field.

Matthew Trulio

EVENTS

OCTOBER

11-13 47th Northwest Turfgrass Conference. Holiday Inn & Conference Center, Yakima, WA. Contact: Northwest Turfgrass Association (206) 754-0825.


NOVEMBER


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

DECEMBER

1-2 Turfgrass and Ornamental Pest Control Workshop. Turfgrass Technology Center, Plymouth, MI. Contact: Jeff Lefton (317) 846-7020.


Send announcements on your events two months in advance to:
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