

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

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 even 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 may eventually know and value a superior athletic field.

Matthew Trulio

EVENTS

CALENDAR

OCTOBER

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

21 Quality Sports Turf Management Seminar. California State University, Fresno, Business School Conference Facility and the Practice Soccer Field, Fresno, CA. Contact: Pam Elam (209) 488-3285

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.

DECEMBER

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

2-3 Arbo Expo. Valley Forge Convention Center, Valley Forge, PA. Contact: Susan Sweitzer (619) 770-4370.



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editor, *sportsTURF* magazine,
68-860 Perez Road, Suite J,
Cathedral City, CA, 92234.
Fax (619) 770-8019.