

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE



Calculating Risk

We have all heard the *other* definition of **assume** at one time or another in our lives. Assuming something doesn't get anybody off the hook when a disaster occurs. When athletes assume risk and suffer injuries, a court's verdict won't necessarily favor the owner

of the facility where the accident occurred. Judges are finally getting this message, as reported by a professor of sports law at Iowa State University in *Athletic Business* this month.

The amount of risk assumed by athletes when playing a sport at a facility has been narrowed. John Wolohan alerted readers that Florida might have set a precedent when the Florida 3rd District Court of Appeal awarded damages to a player because of negligence in supervision. Wolohan says this opens the door for judgments favoring athletes because of poor facility maintenance, poor facility design or similar duty of a sports facility to provide reasonably safe playing conditions.

Any athletic director or facility manager who places too much trust in assumption of risk by athletes is making a bad assumption. How many players use your facilities? Do any of your facilities have flaws in design or maintenance, especially practice fields? When was the last time you turned down a request by the turf manager for equipment, supplies, more help, registration fee for a sports turf seminar or a raise? When was the last time your field's drainage system, irrigation system and soil profile were overhauled? Have your liability and hospitalization insurance rates been climbing steadily?

Interpreting the law always creates more questions. Do you dare to assume how assumption of risk is interpreted in your state right now?

Just as there are experts in law, insurance and risk management, there are experts in sports turf design and management. Too many public facilities fail to hire or consult qualified sports turf specialists.

A big item on the to-do list of the sports turf industry should be some type of certification that identifies qualified experts in our field. Every city in the country has a number of skilled groundskeepers who would qualify immediately. There are also national consultants who will travel to your facility.

We should all seek the achievement of this year's *sportsTURF* Man of the Year, Ed Birch — No field-related injuries on his school district's fields in 12 years. He sought expert advice and assumed nothing.

Bruce F. Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

JANUARY

24 Turfgrass, Landscape and Sports Turf Institute Sequoia Athletic Club, Buena Park, CA. Contact: Southern California Turfgrass Council, P.O. Box 2950, Corona, CA 91718-2950.

25-27 Annual Utah Green Industry Conference and Trade Show at the Utah State Fairpark Grand Building, Salt Lake City. Sponsors include Utah Nursery and Landscape Association, Utah Chapter ASLA and the Irrigation Association. Contact: Stephen A. Linde, (801) 565-8880 or Larry Rupp (801) 797-2255.

26 Inland Northwest Turf and Landscape Trade Show. Spokane Interstate Fairgrounds, Spokane, WA. Contact: Julie Boyce, (509) 535-8305.

30-31 Turfgrass Conference, sponsored by the Louisiana Turfgrass Association and LSU Agricultural Center. Baton Rouge, LA. Contact: (504) 388-2158. Fax: (504) 388-1068.

FEBRUARY

31-2 Mid-America Green Industry Convention, "Magic '95." Hosted by the Professional Lawn Care Association of Mid-America. The Plaza Inn, Kansas City, MO. Contact: (816) 561-5323.

1-2 Turf and Grounds Exposition II, Suffern, NY. Up to 21.5 NYS DEC pesticide recertification credits available. Contact: NYSTA, (800) 873-TURF or (518) 783-1229.

2 Fifteenth Annual Nor Cal Spring Trade Show. San Mateo Expo Center, San Mateo, CA, sponsored by the California Association of Nurserymen. Contact: Margo Jonsson, (916) 961-6814.

4-8 STMA Sixth Annual National Conference and Exhibition, Pirate City, Bradenton, FL. Contact: Carey Haines, (312) 644-6610.

7-8 Southern Illinois Grounds Maintenance School and Trade Show. Gateway Convention Center, Collinsville, IL. Contact: Ron Cornwell, (618) 692-9434. Fax: (618) 692-9808.