

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE



Date to Remember

Don't forget that *November 30* is the deadline for completing questionnaires for the Field of the Year awards. You don't have to pay an entry fee or be an STMA member to compete. Nor must you have a big budget — the winner of last year's Football Field Award was not a pro or college facility, but a hard-working high school.

To obtain a questionnaire, call STMA at (800) 323-3875 and request an "Awards Program" packet, which contains questionnaires for baseball, softball, football and soccer fields. For the baseball awards, you can short-cut the process by answering Partac/Beam Clay's "Diamond of the Year" ad in this issue, which displays the types of questions asked about the other fields as well.

Covering Your Grass

STMA member Scott Gaunky, groundskeeper of Mundelein High School in northern Illinois, provides lessons for others in how to use a turf cover to protect a field.

First, you must get a turf cover — which is no small purchase for a high school. Gaunky finagled a cover through personal enterprise. On his own time, he went out and solicited materials to build a good infield for Mundelein's ball diamond. When school administrators saw the showpiece, they felt obliged to protect "their" investment and purchased a turf cover for the infield.

Next, you must learn how to use the cover — otherwise, it'll harm rather than help your turf. For his education, Gaunky went to fellow STMA member Ken Mrock, groundskeeper for the Chicago Bears. Six years of healthy turf later, Gaunky is a cover master himself and shares the essentials of a program that eases his prized infield through the winter and promotes a quick, healthy green-up in spring.

(1) The program starts during the growing season when he puts down 14 to 18 pounds of potash and two to three pounds of ammonium sulfate per 1,000 square feet. This diet, especially the potash, strengthens cell walls, which helps harden turf for winter.

(2) The next step is to get the cover up and down at the right times (neither too soon nor too late) to avoid heat damage. For Gaunky, that means laying the cover down after the first heavy frost, usually early November, and pulling it up just before the baseball season, in mid-March. By that time, thanks to speedy spring transition, the grass is growing, healthy, and tougher than portions of the diamond that go uncovered.

(3) Before covering the field, he applies a granular fungicide to the turf, primarily for snow mold.

(4) During the winter, he monitors the temperature under the cover, especially during warm spells, to ensure the grass doesn't cook. Otherwise, he rarely checks beneath it. Since the cover is air, light and moisture permeable, the grass suffers little stress. Even under heavy, wet snow, the grass does not suffocate, largely because his infield is turtlebacked (crowned), which provides good drainage.

The efficient drainage allows snow to act as an insulating blanket, protecting dormant turf against many of the hazards of winter. In Gaunky's experience, the more snow, the better. One year when Mundelein's diamond received little snow the grass did not green up as well. The infield was slower to respond than usual, but the uncovered grass was even slower. Without either snow or a turf cover, the grass was more susceptible to wind burn and dessication.

Jim Williams

EVENTS

CALENDAR

October

22-23 The First Step to Behavior-Based Safety. Two days of training in behavioral methods for accident prevention. Offered by Behavioral Science Technology Inc. The Westin Galleria, Dallas, TX. For information, call (800) 548-5781 or (805) 646-0166; fax, (805) 646-0328; e-mail, bstojai@bscitech.com.

24 Third Annual Southeast Texas Grounds Maintenance Conference. Conroe, TX. Contact: Patti Jones, Montgomery County Extension Office, (409) 539-7822.

27-29 California Fertilizer Association Annual Meeting. Loews Coronado Bay Resort, Coronado, CA. Contact: CFA, (916) 441-1584.

27-30 26th Annual National Institute on Park and Grounds Management Conference and Show. Minneapolis, MN. Contact: (414) 733-2301.

October/November

31-1 The First Step to Behavior-Based Safety. The Radisson Barcelo, Orlando, FL. For more information, see first listing, above.

November

3-6 International Conference on Evapotranspiration and Irrigation Scheduling, in conjunction with the Irrigation Association EXPO, sponsored by the American Society of Agricultural Engineers. Convention Center, San Antonio, TX. Contact: ASAE, (616) 429-0300.

11-12 Golf Course Superintendents Association of Northern California's Educational Showcase, *The Golf Course Institute*. Coconut Grove, Santa Cruz, CA. Contact: GCSANC at (916) 626-0931.

Send announcements of your events two months in advance to:
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