

THE FRONT LINES

So You Think You're So Smart?

By Dave Ashman

Perhaps you know people who pride themselves on being able to solve any problem. No matter how big or small the problem, they have the answer. "Been there and done that" is their battle cry, and they wonder why the rest of you haven't figured it out yet. These are the people who have the phone number of sport talk shows on their speed dial and use it daily. This is the story of one of these people. The names have been changed to protect the innocent. Meet Dave, a turf guy who's got it all figured out.

Would You Please Turn off the Sprinklers!

It is Monday and football practice started over an hour ago, and everything seems to be going well. Dave walks by the field and double-checks everything. The head coach is happy,



Players observe a moment of silence for the last turf manager who over-watered the field.

so Dave takes off for home. About 40 minutes later, Dave gets a page from the coach. It seems the irrigation system started just as practice was winding down.

"No big deal," says the coach. "Just make sure it doesn't happen tomorrow." Dave leaves a message for the groundskeeper to double-check the clock settings in the morning and to check the irrigation schedule for the field. Later that night a storm drops about a quarter inch of rain on the field.

Tuesday morning Dave double-checks the irrigation clock and finds the time of day setting on the clock was off the mark. The weather service is predicting rain, so Dave reprograms the system but does not engage the timer to irrigate the field. The problem is fixed in a few minutes. The field is wet but should be okay for practice.

In the late afternoon Dave gets a page from the coach. The irrigation system is running and they need to turn it off now. The field is already wet and the additional water is a safety concern. The coach cancels practice. All of the grounds staff have left for the day and no one has the key to the irrigation control box.

"No problem," Dave says, "just turn off the power to the timer from the breaker box and the irrigation system will stop running." The immediate problem is resolved, but Dave has no idea why the system was turned on. A message is left for the grounds crew to make sure all of the clocks are working correctly. Later that night a storm brings more rain.

Wednesday morning the field is soaked. Dave checks the clock. The power is on, and all indicators say the irrigation system was on last night. The field is wet, but it should dry out

by practice time. The crew works the field to make sure the turf is ready for practice, but there are some areas that will not be in the best shape for football. Dave advises the coach of the situation and promises he will be on the field during practice to make sure everything is okay.

"No problem," Dave says, "I have shut off the water supply to the irrigation system and turned off the power to the clock at the circuit breaker." Later that day, practice starts without incident. Just as the team gets ready to scrimmage, the irrigation system starts running. The coach is furious. It takes about five minutes to shut the system down. When the scrimmage resumes, there is just enough water to make the surface slick. Three players are hurt when they slip while scrimmaging. The coach makes it absolutely clear that this situation is unacceptable and the situation will be resolved now. Dave has no idea how this could have occurred.

As Dave begins his investigation he finds that several independent events created the problem. On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the week, a construction project next to the field required the power supply to be interrupted several times. Each time the power was cut, the contractor reset the clock to the default settings. On Tuesday and Wednesday, another construction project in a different area required the field's water supply to be temporarily shut off at various times. After each shut down, a plumber checked every impacted area and made sure the water supply was restored. Three different groups with three different managers who could fix any problem never talked to each other.

There is a moral to this story. Communicate. Share what you know even if you think it is not relevant to anyone but yourself. A one-minute phone call would have eliminated this problem before it started.

I would like to thank all of the people who have contributed their stories and pictures to this column. If you have a story or anecdote you would like to share, call (562) 425-2449 or write it down (include your name and phone number) and mail it to: Ashman & Associates, 3164 North Greenbrier Road, Long Beach, CA 90808.

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