



Just What We Hoped For

By Dick Ericson

When I first started in this business, you had to learn it all by yourself. There were few resources in print or in educational systems to tap even the basics, let alone such specifics as maintenance of baseball's infield clay.

Back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, sports turf managers would hear about new developments and techniques from players who had seen them on other fields. Lots of established groundskeepers who were "in the know" guarded as secrets the field-care techniques they had learned through their own trial-and-error and hard work.

But a few of us, including George Toma and Harry Gill, wanted to share those techniques and ideas. We'd talk by phone three or four times a year to discuss problems and the ways to solve those problems. We found that, no matter which end of the conversation you were on, you ended up learning something you could put to work on your own field. We also discovered that we each were getting lots of calls from others in the business looking for the same kinds of information we were already sharing. At the same time, public concerns about field quality were growing as sports events became more popular on television.

So, in 1981, at the end of a turfgrass conference with Dr. Bill Daniel's group at Purdue University, about 35 of us got together to start an organization — the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) — to make the job easier for everyone by promoting sports-turf-specific education and the sharing of information. I had the honor of being named the first president.

Back in the '70s, when a baseball "took a bad hop" it could fly so high it actually jumped over a player's head. Today's players expect to put a glove down and have the ball head right into it — and it usually does. Safety is, and has always been, the driving force behind field care. Aesthetics also are important now. Groundskeepers soon learned that everyone expects a field to play as good as it looks, and good-looking fields draw fewer complaints. While expectations are higher now, so is the ability to meet those expectations.

Those of us fortunate enough to have been there in the beginning have had the opportunity to see STMA grow. To me, it's almost unbelievable the progress that has been made, in STMA and in the whole sports turf industry. Technology is moving so fast there's more reason than ever to have STMA as a conduit for information. The sports turf education offered through various colleges and universities, this magazine, and STMA's newsletter (*Sports Turf Manager*) and the great opportunities for networking at chapter functions and the annual conference are exactly what we were hoping for when STMA first started.

Dick Ericson was STMA's first president, is an Honorary Life Member and continues as one of STMA's strong supporters. Ericson retired from his position as stadium superintendent of the Minneapolis Metrodome two years ago.

Irrigating Mistakes

By Dave Minner

The following are three common irrigation mistakes on athletic fields:

1. Overwatering — too much, too often, too shallow. As a general rule, turf should be allowed to wilt slightly before irrigation. At this stage of wilting, soils are well-aerated because air has replaced the water removed from soil pore spaces by roots. Roots need water to grow, but they also need air-filled pore space. Excessively wet soils become anaerobic and have a distinct sulfur odor of rotten eggs. Root growth is poor in anaerobic conditions.

Allow the turf to wilt slightly and then apply about an inch of water. Wait until the turf just begins to wilt before watering again. About 1.0 to 1.5 inches of water per week is sufficient for soil-based fields. Sand-based fields may require more frequent watering.

2. Mid-day watering of grass. This increases humidity and free moisture near the plant that results in increased disease.

3. No plan for watering the skin on baseball/softball fields. Don't forget to install separate heads and valves for watering just the infield dirt. Don't place the heads so they water both the dirt and the grass. Watering the skin portion of an infield is just as important as watering the grass. A separate station is needed for watering the skin infield because it is managed differently from grass. □

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If you have a tip to share, send it to sportsTURF, 68860 Perez Rd., Cathedral City, CA 92234.



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