

NFL Techniques for Better and Safer Fields

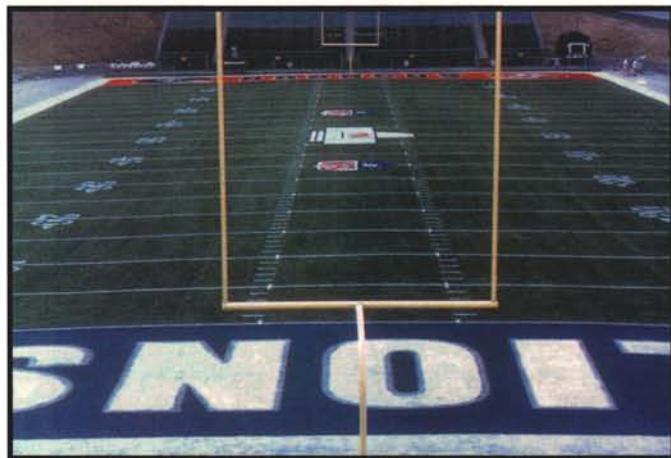
NFL grounds crews must maintain the highest standards of quality in their field preparation practices. These professionals maintain the highest profile turf in the country, but they share the same ultimate goals of every sports turf manager: safety and playability.

The following techniques help these NFL groundskeepers maintain professional-quality athletic turf.

Get ready for football

by Ross Kurcab, Denver Broncos Football Club

A high-quality football field management program that uses its resources efficiently and meets the needs of the users is a continual work in progress. Any athletic field is a dynamic and perishable product. It often seems that I never have the same field in any given week during the year.



It is this continual change that draws many of us to the profession. However, this also means that we cannot manage our fields by a simple "cookbook" recipe.

• There's always the budget

I realize that few fields are allocated the kinds of resources that NFL fields receive. Some techniques are simply out of the scope of many turf managers' budgets.

If your administration refuses to fund an upgrade or product that you think will increase quality, try the procedure on just one field, or even just one small part of a field. This way, you can better show the benefits of your request to the money people.

• Develop and maintain a good field log

I know it can seem cumbersome to stop in the middle of a project or application to take notes, but a few minutes spent can be incredibly valuable.

A good field log means never having to calibrate the same application twice. It's a wonderful planning and budgeting tool.

When we topdress the fields, for example, I save a lot of time by simply finding my notes from the last time we did it: "Tractor at 2500 RPMs, low range, 2nd gear, hopper setting of 3; used a total of 75 tons of sand for a rate of 18.75 tons/acre; took three people four hours to spread and two hours to broom in." It took me two minutes to write this down, yet it saves about four man-hours every time we topdress by eliminating the calibration process.

A good way to start is to simply obtain a desk calendar that has enough room each day for some notes, or one that allows you to reference more detailed entries. Give it a try, I think you'll be surprised at how many different ways it will be useful to you.

• Communicate with field users

Players, coaches, support staff, trainers, adminis-



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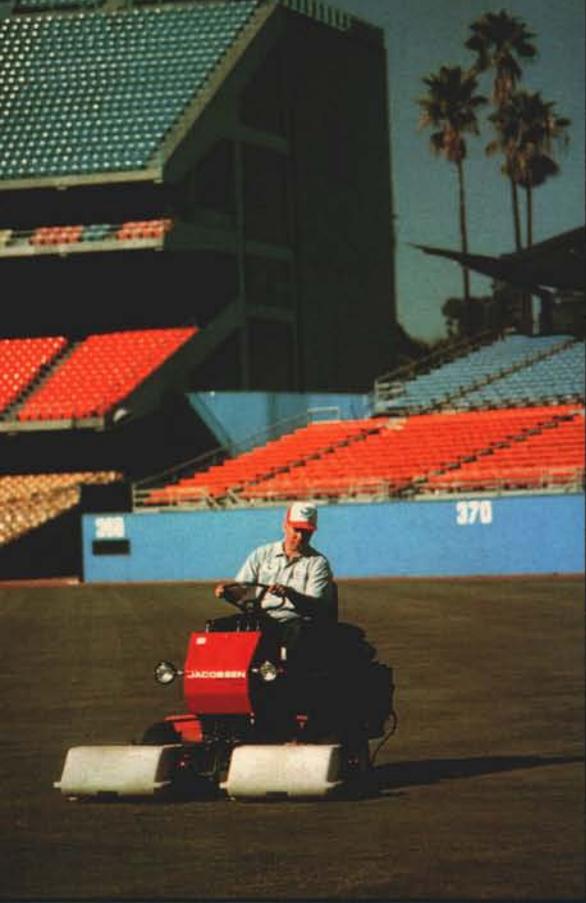


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trators, media, and fans can all be considered "field users." You cannot satisfy them without feedback.

Take critical feedback and make field users aware of your plight. I always try to thank people who give me feedback on my fields — good or bad — especially if they point out a safety concern.

You could put a field message board in the locker room, or near the main entrance to the field. It will help you communicate field-related concerns to the users. Supplement this with a simple end of season survey of the users.

It's also important to develop a relationship with the media. As with all field users, they are much less likely to criticize the field when they know who manages it and how much pride you put into your work.

• **Make field safety your highest priority**
Regular and frequent field

inspections are an absolute must. Develop a pre-event safety checklist to document your inspections, and have a qualified person on the field management staff regularly complete the form.

Crew members who mow the field daily make good field inspectors. They will almost always uncover problems with the mower. They go over every square foot of the field on a regular basis.

If you oversee too many fields to conduct inspections yourself, have any technicians that work on the field fill out a signed and dated checklist before they leave it.

Unfortunately, there will always be injuries on a football field. You simply must show due diligence in documenting the prevention, identification, and correction of all field safety concerns.

• **Grow healthy grass**
This may sound obvious, but
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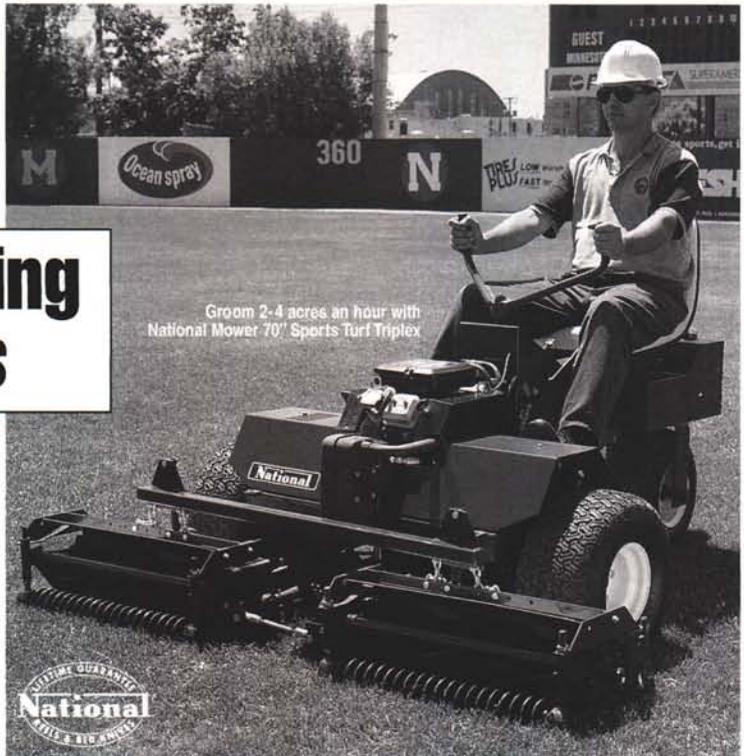
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it involves much more than the scope of this article allows. Healthy grass contributes strongly to all three aspects of a quality football field: safety, playability, and appearance.

You need to continually educate yourself in turfgrass management. Education can be formal or informal, but it is an absolute must. The technological advances in our

industry move fast, so it takes a process of continual education to keep up.

- **Be flexible**

Troy, Wes, and I often joke that we don't really make plans, we just develop scenarios and figure out how to address them. I'm sure you can relate!

Mowing practices

by Steve Wightman,
Qualcomm Stadium

When attempting to provide a better and safer playing surface, few things are more important than a thick, dense turfgrass cover. Many factors, such as proper soil conditions, prudent irrigation, and fertility play a major role, but proper mowing practices can contribute significantly to a safe, dense, playable turfgrass cover.

- **Height of cut**

Different types of grasses prefer different mowing heights. Knowing the predominant turfgrass species on your field is the first step in proper mowing. If your field consists of warm-season turfgrass species, the preferred mowing height is typically lower than that of cool-season turfgrasses.

Warm-season grasses, such as bermudagrass and Zoysiagrass, prefer mowing heights between 0.75 inches and 1.0 inch. Hybrid bermuda prefers a 0.5-inch to 0.75-inch height.

Cool-season turfgrasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass, prefer mowing heights between one inch and two inches. Perennial ryegrasses, tall fescues, and others prefer to maintain a 1.5-inch to 2.5-inch height.

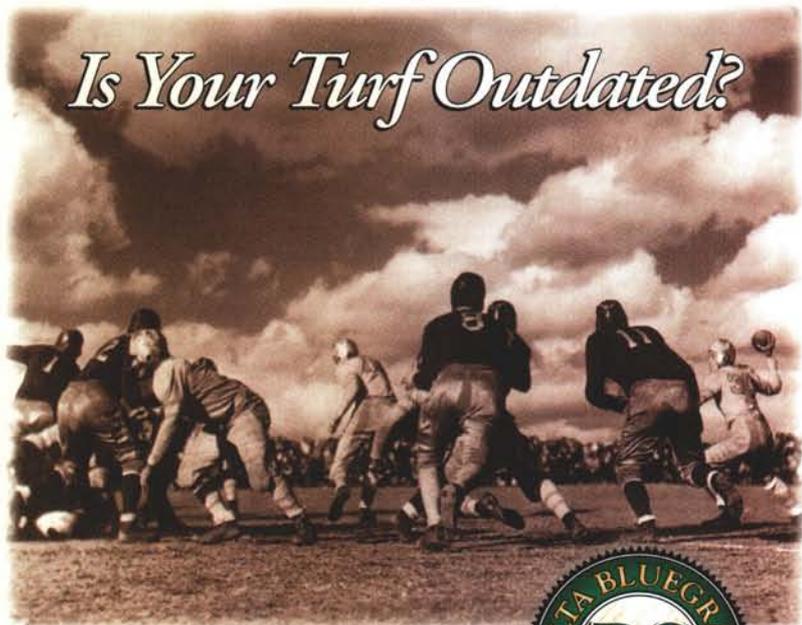
Mowing within preferred height of cut ranges will promote a denser canopy without sacrificing root growth. Mowing lower than the preferred height adversely affects root growth, and mowing higher usually promotes a thinner canopy that encourages weed encroachment.

A single field may have many different turfgrass species with both warm- and cool-season grasses. It's important to identify the type of turfgrass you wish to maintain. The time of year play occurs on your fields usually determines which species to promote.

If your field is heavily scheduled during autumn and/or spring, promote your cool-season turfgrasses with mowing heights between 1.0 and 2.5 inches. If your field is heavily used during the summer months, warm-season grasses should be promoted with mowing heights between 0.5 and 1.0 inch.

There are times when it makes sense to manage both warm- and cool-season grasses simultaneously. If this is the case with your field,

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