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**
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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,