

Glynn County Stadium Earns Top Honors as STMA 1998 High School Football Field of the Year

by Bob Tracinski

STMA's 1998 High School Field of the Year, Glynn County Stadium, Brunswick, Ga., is in the heart of serious football territory. Coaches and players are dedicated to the game, and fans love it. It takes a high quality field to meet—and exceed—a community's lofty expectations, and this field has done it.

The stadium is located two blocks off U.S. Highway 17 on the Atlantic Coast, just one hour south of Savannah, Ga., and one hour north of Jacksonville, Fla. Marsh land and the ocean lie on one side of the field; a long-closed, sealed landfill, now used for the stadium's overflow parking, lies on the other.

Field Construction

Funding to build the facility came through a publicly-approved \$1.875 million bond issue in the fall of 1985. Actual construction took place in 1986. Seating capacity is 12,013 including 2,300 reserved seats and 20 wheelchair spaces. There is a two story press box on the home side and a field house with full locker room facilities for both home and visiting teams, plus public restrooms and a concession area. Night lighting consists of four poles, each 98 feet tall, with a total of 72 metal halite fixtures.

Part of the land that now holds the stadium was once a small airport. The remainder was acquired from Coastal Georgia Community College and, as part of the original agreement, the complex was to be available for the college's use should they ever institute a football program. Pine trees, planted in rows, covered much of the land acquired from the college.

"When the trees and stumps were removed, what was left was decomposed organic matter mixed with the very sandy native soil," Don Skeens, grounds and sports turf director, says. "It was used to provide an excellent profile for



STMA President Steve Guise (right) presents the Field of the Year Award to Don Skeens, Glynn County Stadium.

our field. We'll still pull up some pine pieces during aeration, but that's a minor problem.

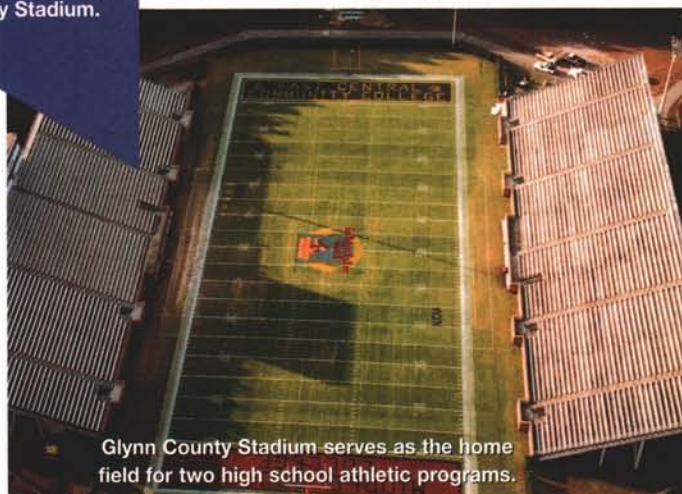
"The field was constructed with an 8-inch crown from center field to sideline. Over the years, that crowning had diminished. Starting in 1995, we've brought in a verti-drain unit in early June to deep aerate the field. We use this in two directions, covering the field lengthwise and widthwise. We then apply between 110 and 120 tons of topdressing sand. The sand is laser graded after having been strategically placed to fill in low areas and gradually rebuild the crown. We spend approximately \$4,000 for each summer's process, but the payback is a

tremendous improvement in the drainage, turf quality, condition, color, root production, rapid growth and overall appearance of the field.

"A six-inch drain tile is buried in the swale along the sidelines of the field. Catch basins located along the tile catch any excess water and channel it to a holding basin. The field can handle most downpours and remain playable without any wet or 'mushy' spots."

Rush Hour Traffic

Handling play is an understatement for this heavily-used facility where football reigns from Aug. 15 into December. The varsity football teams of the two district high schools, Glynn Academy and Brunswick High, each play five or six home games in the fall. For the last four years, there have been at least two playoff games on the field, starting the week before Thanksgiving. In 1999 there



Glynn County Stadium serves as the home field for two high school athletic programs.

were three consecutive Friday night playoff games, running into December.

The freshmen and junior varsity teams from each school use the district's older stadium for their regular game field, but play each other at Glynn County Stadium for the last game of their season. Every third year, the field

hosts a round robin jamboree of four teams (two outside teams and the two home teams), with each team playing a quarter and a half.

There's also the high school football spring training season. That brings two weeks of practice culminating with a game between the two teams at the stadium, usually on the last Saturday of May. Then there is the Golden Isle Bowl, a season-ending junior college

game that raises money for the area's middle school athletic programs.

"The bowl game is always on the first Saturday of December and involves junior and community colleges only," Skeens says. "One of the two junior colleges in Georgia always is invited. We try to select the highest ranked team available as the opponent. This past year, Georgia Military played Montgomery Junior College out of

Montgomery, Md., with the game going back-to-back, Friday and Saturday, with our third high school playoff game. The Golden Isle Bowl has been called "The Only Junior College Bowl Game East of the Mississippi River."

As if that weren't enough, for two years, a local semi-professional team from the Southeastern League had leased the field for five additional games, plus a potential of up to three playoff games. That team disbanded after the 1998 season.

The soccer season begins in early February and runs through the end of April. Each school has both boys and girls freshman, junior varsity and varsity teams and each of them play about eight to nine games on the field, for a total of approximately 48 games. The playoffs come on top of that.

The middle school now plays both football and soccer. Their game field is located inside the outdoor track on site. So during football and soccer seasons, there generally are home games on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights at the other game fields and on Friday nights and some Saturdays at Glynn County Stadium. There are also nine practice fields and a lighted baseball field.

"Our crew of three groundskeepers and their supervisor have the responsibility of painting and lining all the game fields along with handling the maintenance on all the fields," Skeens says. "They do a great job."

Maintenance Challenges

The region's mild weather produces another set of challenges in the form of insect and disease infestations. Skeens notes mole crickets are the toughest and most consistent pest, with controlling them being an issue of not if, but when.

"Mole crickets can ruin an athletic field in a week, so continual monitoring is essential," Skeens says. "Insecticide applications must be made at just the right stage of their cycle to get the best results, and products must be alternated to avoid developing resistance. Application timing also must be coordinated with field use schedules. IPM practices are essential in keeping the upper hand."

Any major field work must take place between the last week of May and Aug. 15 to accommodate football "walk throughs" and band on-field positioning practices once or twice for each school before the season kicks off.



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A Dedicated Professional

Skeens is a master at planning, not only to get everything accomplished, but also, as he puts it, "To get a pretty good product for a pretty reasonable budget." He brings a strong background to the task, having obtained a B.S. degree from the University of Florida with a minor in Forestry and several courses in Public Administration, before earning his Masters degree in Parks and Recreation from Indiana University. Add to that the strong work ethic and love of the land he gained from growing up on his family's farm to understand why he checks the field seven days a week year-round. Besides that, he's been taking care of the field for 10 of its 13 years, the first six years as the recreation director of landscape responsibilities, and from 1995 to the present in his current position.

Skeens is dedicated to achieving the best possible results, making sure the field is monitored when he can't be there. He is also dedicated to developing his own professionalism, visiting other fields and connecting with other

field managers to share ideas. He's always seeking not just the solution to a problem, but the best solution.

Skeens has developed a win-win informal networking arrangement with a local four-golf course resort complex. He'll consider a purchase option when they're ready to trade up on equipment, which gives him good used equipment at a reasonable price and gives the course more flexibility on their upgrades.

He has also tapped into a money-saving method of using the stadium's irrigation system. The irrigation water source is an enclosed, 8-inch deep well, located just inside the field house, with a 1,000 gallon tank. An above-ground, 25 hp centrifugal pump pulls 280 gallons per minute from the well. Skeens uses four Nelson "guns" to irrigate the field, putting down a lot of water in a short period. Only one of the guns can be used at a time since one takes the full capacity of the pump. A row of pop up rotor heads running down the center of the field is the only underground portion of the irrigation system. The pump and

well combination also supply water to the restrooms during the games. City water is used only for the concession stand and the locker rooms.

"The field bond issue was highly criticized during the first few years following construction, but as our program has evolved and the field has become a high-quality resource used by a broad spectrum of the community, it's become a source of pride," Skeens says. "Coaches love to play here, and earning the Field of the Year Award has brought us even more recognition and compliments. With all that, I think the greatest satisfaction comes from seeing the appreciation on the faces of our student athletes each time they walk on the field."

Bob Tracinski is the Business Communications Manager for the John Deere Worldwide Commercial & Consumer Equipment Division headquartered in Raleigh, NC. He serves as public relations co-chair for the national Sports Turf Managers Association.



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