



Play Ball!

Last month I began to hear a phrase on the television and radio, a phrase I had been waiting months to hear: *Pitchers and catchers report*—the four sweetest words to a die-hard baseball fan such as myself. More than suggesting the impending opening of another baseball season, the phrase reminds me that even though it's snowy and cold in Chicago, spring is right around the corner. And even though my beloved Cubbies will probably be out of the hunt by July, at least I can count on getting a nice tan in the bleachers at Wrigley, watching the ivy grow green and thick over the bricks of the outfield wall.

While the crack of the bat and the pop of rawhide meeting leather might draw the most public attention at Major League facilities this spring, they represent only a tiny fraction of the number of baseball players in organized leagues who are gearing up for the start of their seasons. Groundskeepers for thousands of parks across North America—whether they are from parks and recreation departments, colleges or professional stadiums—must begin preparing their fields just as hard as the players prepare themselves for the new season.

Hopefully this special baseball-theme issue of *sportsTURF* will assist all groundskeepers who manage a baseball field with tips and advice for making their fields as safe and attractive as possible. No matter who plays on your field—the 4-foot tall little league shortstop with his or her comically oversized hat and glove; the 50-year old pitcher for a park district league who can still baffle hitters with his knuckle ball; the 17-year old A Ball rookie, playing his first game for which he'll be paid; or last year's Major League Most Valuable Player, stepping up to the plate for his first at bat of the season—all players deserve a safe, consistent field. Be sure to check out all the articles in this issue for information you can apply to your field.

Certification Update

The year 2000 marks the introduction of the STMA Sports Field Manager Certification program. At the annual conference in St. Louis this past January, Ross Kurcab was recognized at the awards banquet as the first applicant to successfully complete all the requirements to become a Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM).

Since that time, four other STMA members have gone on to earn the CSFM status as well. Here is a list of the five current CSFMs:

- Ross Kurcab—Turf Manager, Denver Broncos
- Dale Getz—Athletic Facilities Manager, Notre Dame University
- Eric Adkins—Agronomist, Northwestern University
- Ted Baker—Superintendent of Parks, Highland Park Park District (Ill.)
- Mike Schiller—Superintendent of Parks, Rolling Meadows Park District (Ill.)

Congratulations are in order for these highly-qualified and motivated individuals. Way to go!

If you haven't received an applicant packet and would like one, or if you have any questions about the certification process, contact STMA Headquarters: phone (800) 323-3875; fax (712) 366-9119; or e-mail SportsTMgr@aol.com. Good luck!

Michael SanFilippo

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Tip of the Month

Controlling Field Traffic

by Floyd Perry



Unchecked public use of sports fields leads to damage on and around the turf.

Many school boards and municipalities are stretched to the limit in daily field care. Some parents say the maintenance staff just doesn't care about their facilities. I find that statement somewhat shallow because I know there is an honest attempt to prepare the fields properly. There's just too much extra traffic on the fields to get them game ready.

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One school board came up with a simple solution to ensure their fields were safe and relatively liability-free: They locked the gates. Is the chemistry lab open all hours for any taxpayer to come in and mix formulas after the school day? Is the library open all hours for any taxpayer to enter and destroy all the books? Of course not. Does the taxpayer have free access to all public property? Of course not. Then should the athletic fields be open for taxpayers to walk their dogs, hit golf balls or spin their dirt bikes daily?

Granted, not every small community can follow this procedure, but keep in mind lawsuits involving small communities occur just as frequently as in large metro communities.

As a taxpayer in our example community, you or your community group can use any school/recreation facility inside or out if you follow these simple procedural guidelines:

A. You find out if the specific area



Heavy traffic on this baseball field has led to serious drainage problems.

is scheduled by a school team (first priority).

B. You fill out a request form with your group's insurance I.D. number (city's protection).

C. You pay for a custodian or groundskeeper to oversee your use while on the property (safety valve for assistance and security).

This is a positive approach to handling a serious problem—facility abuse without repair compensation.

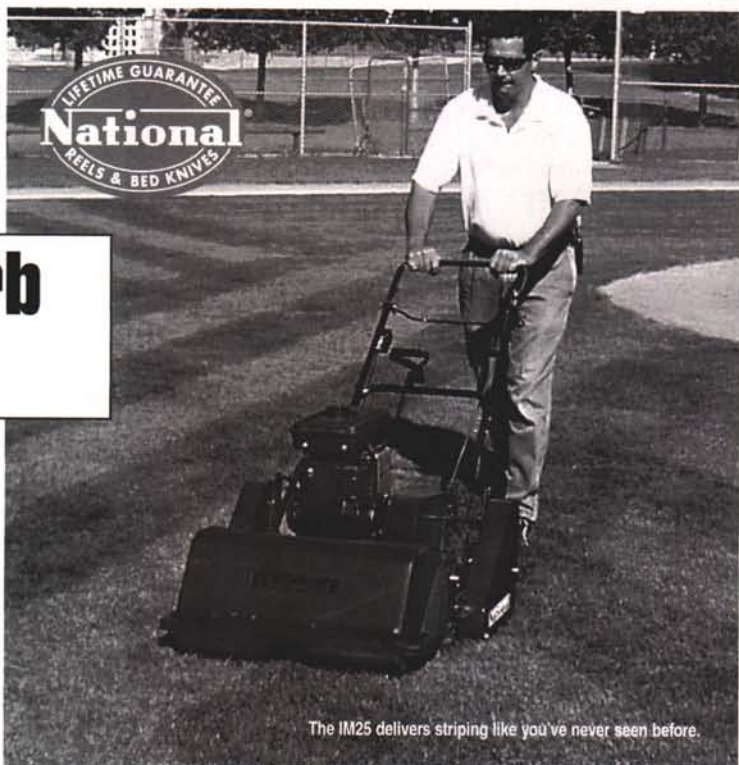
This school board has had tremendous success in communicating their message to the taxpayers; we want our physical education classes, athletes and community groups to use the school board facil-



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ities in a safe and hazard free manner, no different from the civic center, courthouse or city park. A liability waiver/user fee replenishes the budget for equipment and facility improvement for the neighborhood and leasing group.

I have tried to encourage school board maintenance supervisors in our GMS facility seminars to initiate a program of locking their gates to protect against excessive outside usage. Their replies are always the same: The principal, mayor or director won't back them and the gates must be left open after school as well as weekends. Can you imagine if the principal left the school doors unlocked all weekend? Can you imagine what would happen if the mayor left city hall open all weekend? I don't think I have the time to explain what would happen in that scenario.



Floyd Perry was a high school and college coach in Orlando, Fla., and now travels around the country coordinating workshops and seminars on grounds maintenance and facility improvement. He has authored three textbooks—A pictorial Guide to Quality Groundskeeping I, Covering All the Bases, Book II, There Ain't No Rules and Book III, Maintain it Easy, Keep it Safe. Floyd has also produced two videos, The ABC's of Grounds Maintenance; Volume 1, Softball and Volume II, Baseball. For more information call 800-227-9381.

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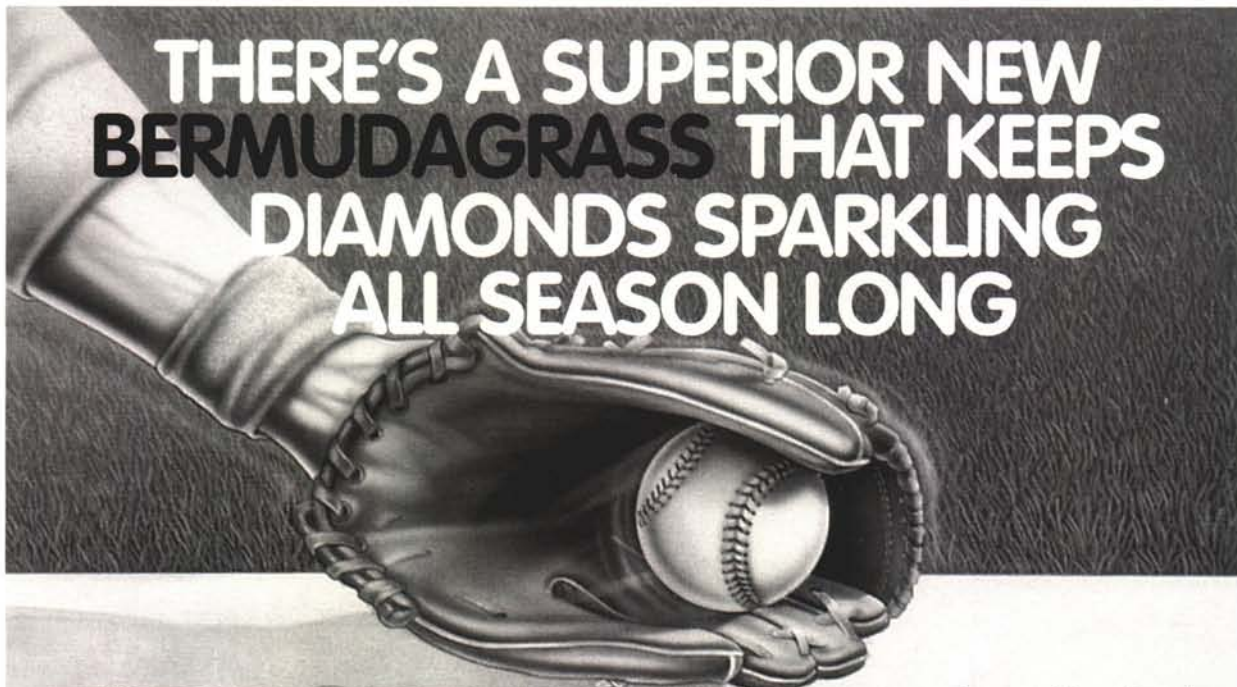
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