

Graphic Design

The Secrets to Outstanding Field Painting by Bob Milano Jr.

Every Sunday during the fall, you turn on your television set and up pops one beautiful NFL stadium field after another. It's not just that the turf is a rich green color and perfectly manicured, but the striping and logos look great. You might initially think that it is a result of money. Yes, the financial resources at major stadiums (staff, equipment and specialized materials) do play a key role, but the graphic design of the field as a unit and each logo play just as important a role in achieving the results we see on game day.

Granted, not all of us can afford to hire an artist to evaluate design alternatives and devise specialized event logos like the NFL can, but we must consider the graphics as an integral part of the work we do. A top-notch field requires three elements: outstanding turf/soil surfaces, exceptional application of the paint and a sharp graphics design.

Before we apply the first gallon of paint to the beautiful turf canvas we have nurtured for months, we must have carefully planned and methodically decided upon the exact graphics for the event. No matter how exacting we are with the layout or how carefully we apply the paint, we will surely be disappointed with the overall appearance of the field if the graphic presentation is not well planned.

Graphic Design Basics

Graphic design is everywhere in our daily lives; on the cereal boxes we read in the morning, on the bumper stickers we view on our way to work and on the lawn mowers with which we manicure the turf.

We have spent years being educated and trained in the craft and art of groundskeeping; so have graphic designers who toil over every minor detail of a design. In order to understand their world, and to those of us lucky enough to work with a designer in our stadiums and on our fields, it is important to understand their terminology. A basic knowledge of graphic design will assist us in evaluating and understanding what looks good and why, as well as what doesn't work:

- Theme—An overriding mood or feeling for the graphic design
- Foreground—Elements that appear to the front and have greater emphasis
- Background—Elements that appear to the back and have less emphasis
- Scale—The relative size of an object compared to other objects or the whole design

- Negative space—The open or unused area of a graphic in relation to the used areas
- Font—The typestyle of a letter or number
- Stroke—The width of a symbol's components
- Visual Tension—The placement of an object in an unexpected or unbalanced way to increase importance
- Hierarchy of Lines—The relative visual strength and importance of a line compared to another based on its thickness (stroke), color or type
- Visual Balance—The elements, regardless of the size and spacing, provide uniformity and rhythm to the design.

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Groundskeepers need to carefully plan the graphic design of their field in order to create sharp, attractive markings and logos.

Field painting serves a practical function by improving the visual perception for athletes, spectators and television viewers.

The Language of Lines

All of the playing fields we prepare involve lines to define and regulate the competition. These lines form the framework and basic structure for the field and must be graphically evaluated before any decorative markings or logos are considered. In addition to the lines, we need to under-

stand the relative importance of the lines for each sport. For example, the goal line in football is a very important marking and thus should be emphasized in the design.

An easy way to understand this concept is to compare a field layout to an architectural drawing. Architects and engineers use varying line thickness and styles to repre-

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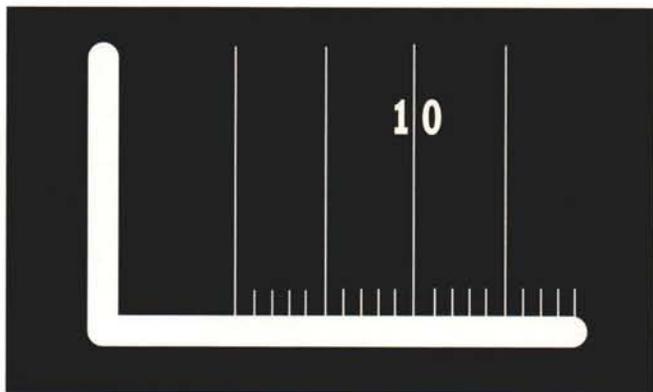


Figure 1

sent different objects and to visually communicate. For example, solid walls are shown as thick bold lines, doors as medium lines, windows as thin lines and movable furniture as very thin lines.

These same communication techniques are used to stripe an NFL field. The perimeter is a bold 6-foot wide line, the goal line is typically about 8 inches wide, the yard lines as much as 5 inches wide, the hash marks about 4 inches wide and the restraining line is dotted. All of these widths are based on the relative importance of each line to the competition and improve the visual perception for the athlete, spectator and television viewer (Figure 1).

If you could only afford to make one change to your football field preparations, you would be amazed what an impact a wider boarder (10 to 12 feet) and a thicker goal line (8 inches) will do to the visual appearance of your football field.

Another important element to consider in the selection of a final graphic

Themes

Another important element to consider in the selection of a final graphic



Figure 2

design is the theme. The entire graphic presentation should relate to both the venue and the event for maximum effectiveness. For example, the tradition-rich history of college football and its historic stadiums many times choose simple graphics.

Notre Dame continues to stripe its football stadium using a very historical theme with simple white end zone diagonal marking, small yard line numbering and narrower than standard hash marks. On the other hand, many arena football teams use very loud multicolor, three-dimensional, graphically striking layouts to fit the theme of the event and focus on a fast paced, up-to-date entertainment sport.

Regardless of the direction, the graphic package needs to consider the event, the site and the participants in order to achieve maximum effectiveness.

Viewing Perspectives

The last element to consider when preparing your graphics plan is the viewing audience. How will it appear to the athletes? Is the primary audience in one specific area? Is the event being broadcast on television? Will the angle of the sun play a role, or is it a night event? Will it be viewed up close or at a distance? All of these factors must be considered in order to achieve the best results.

One of the most important factors is the angle of view, referring to the distance above the ground that the primary view will occur. A design on a flat surface will look much different than it will truly appear from the grandstands or in the press box.

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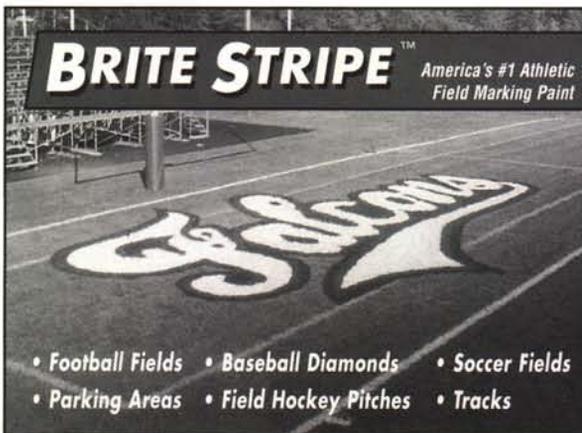
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smaller facilities, there are several tricks that can be used. First, the graphic can be elongated or stretched vertically to improve the graphic effect from the primary perspective. Traffic engineers have done this for some time with pavement marking such as STOP and YIELD when written on the pavement. (Figure 2).

Another technique is to shift the graphic closer to the primary viewer to increase the angle of view. There is no rule that all of the field decorations must be in the exact center of the playing field, so, if it makes sense for your facility, shift the logos closer to the grandstands for a better view.

Another option is to take advantage of a turf slope used to construct many stadiums and ballparks. Painting a logo on these slopes will dramatically improve the viewing angle of the graphic. This can be the most effective facility decoration for a special event.

For events held at night, try using lighter colors (white, gold, etc.) to increase the light reflective potential of the graphics. This is particularly true at facilities with less than professional quality lighting. Dark colors under poor lighting will blend with the dark green color of the turf.

The graphic choices are endless; if you can imagine it, you can paint it on the field, but before you apply the first drop of paint, have a plan and understand the elements

that visually will influence the success of the final work. You are an artist and the composition is just as important as the implementation.

Turf painting can also highlight non-sporting events and provide a festive party atmosphere. Try painting the numbers 2000 on the field at this year's graduation ceremony, or paint a United States flag on the turf to celebrate the Fourth of July. Not only will it improve the overall event, but your work will be noticed, improving both your credibility and professionalism.

These concepts and tools can be applied to any preparation, be it soccer, baseball, rugby, field hockey or lacrosse. We all spend countless hours carefully painting every detail of a field, so stop and spend some time planning the graphics and your customers will notice the results. 

Bob Milano Jr. is the stadiums and sports turf manager for the University of California Athletic Department and a founding member of the Northern California STIMA Chapter.

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