



Ross Kurcab: sportsTURF's 2001 Manager of the Year

by Mike SanFilippo

The year 2000 was a year of firsts. Millions of people around the world watched and celebrated as December 31, 1999 changed to January 1, 2000, and the first day of a new millennium dawned around the globe, from time zone to time zone.

For the STMA, the year 2000 marked the beginning of its certification program, designed to increase professionalism in the industry, promote better and safer sports turf areas and establish credentials that signify a specific level of expertise. And no sooner had the new year begun than Ross Kurcab had been

named the first Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM).

The initiative and determination that Kurcab showed in being the first person to complete and submit the difficult requirements of certification, along with his work both locally and nationally in advancing his profession, have made Kurcab our choice for the 2001 sportsTURF Manager of the Year.

Troy Smith, assistant turfgrass manager with the Denver Broncos, has known Kurcab since 1989, when he served as an intern with the Broncos before assuming his current position

with the club in 1994. Smith witnessed Kurcab's enthusiasm and energy as he prepared for certification.

"Ross was really set on being the first CSFM," Smith said. "He wanted to be number one, which is they way he is about everything."

After pushing for certification for a number of years, Kurcab, who served on the Certification Committee, helped develop the program for the STMA. He studied hard before taking the test in December of 1999, then sent his tests through Fed Ex to ensure they would be graded and



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approved by the end of the month. He passed, and, on January 1, 2000, became the organization's first CSFM.

Kurcab is a 1984 graduate of Colorado State University, where he received his B.S. in Landscape Horticulture/Turfgrass Management. He has served as the turf manager for the NFL's Denver Broncos since June of 1984, where he is responsible for the development and implementation of a year-round practice field program at the team's training facility. In this position he must develop and maintain a yearly operational budget, hire and train new crew members, manage the surrounding landscape and maintain the practice field.

Kurcab has recently transferred the day-to-day operations of the practice facility to Troy Smith, while Kurcab oversees the design, construction, establishment and maintenance of the playing surface at Denver's new \$364.2 million stadium, slated to open in August 2001. He continues to serve as department head and supervisor of the practice facility.

Even with this busy schedule, Kurcab makes time for friends and his fellow turf professionals.

While in Denver, Dr. Tony Koski, a friend of Kurcab's for nearly 13 years, stopped by the Broncos' practice facility with his son to say hello. "Ross took the time to show us around, then asked my son if he wanted to get lunch. He then took us into the team's locker room where all the players were gathered for lunch, and my son got to eat with the team, which was a big thrill for him."



Past President Steve Guise awards Ross Kurcab for becoming the first Certified Sports Field Manager. Courtesy: STMA

Over the past several years Kurcab has run a day-long workshop at the training facility, giving a tour of the fields and facility that is extremely popular among attendees. He also hosts several smaller tours to whoever is interested in the facility, and is generous in doling out Broncos souvenirs and memorabilia.

Kurcab is a founding member and past president of the Colorado Sports Turf Managers Association, which he helped create in 1990. He currently serves as vice president and board member and frequently appears as a featured speaker for the organization's meetings and activities.

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On the national level, Kurcab has been a busy participant as well. At the STMA National Conferences in 1998 and 1999, he served as a discussion leader for round-table discussions on Poa Annuua and the effective use of tarps. In 2000 he led two sessions on establishment and grow-in and successful over-seeding. This year, he will lead three sessions, dealing with the certification process and stabilizing playing surfaces.

Awards and recognition are not new to Kurcab. He was the 1984 recipient of the Rocky Mountain Regional Turfgrass Association (RMRTA) Scholarship. In 1988, he received the RMRTA Turf Professional of the Year Award; in 1990, the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC) Excellence in Landscape Merit Award. And in 1999 The STMA honored him with the Dick Erickson Award, one of STMA's four Founders Awards.

Kurcab's dedication to the profession not only results in better fields, it results in better turf professionals. Several men and women have served under Kurcab through his position with the Broncos, and they have gone on to prominent positions in the industry as well.

"Ross is a great teacher, as evidence by the people who have done internships with him and gone on to other professions in the field," said Koski.

In addition to Smith, Abby McNeal, assistant facilities and grounds manager for Colorado State University, interned under Kurcab in the early 1990s. Both have nothing but heavy praise for the man they credit in helping them prepare for their professional careers.

"Ross has a strong passion for what he does," said McNeal. "He always wants to learn and try new things. That energy is very positive and easy to feed off of."

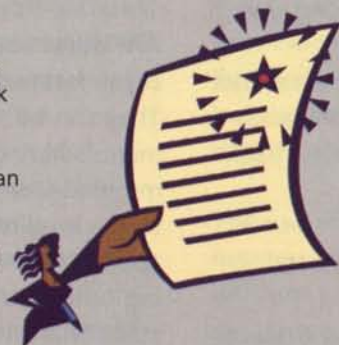
McNeal, who is in frequent contact with Kurcab to ask for advice or information, added: "He's one of my biggest mentors; he's always making me think."

According to Smith, "Ross is a great teacher, he's dedicated and he has a natural instinct on how to grow grass. He's been a great boss, teacher and friend."

Added Smith: "I've never met anyone who loves their job more than he does. His job is very dear to him. He's definitely found a career he loves."

sportsTURF's Managers of the Year

2001: Ross Kurcab
2000: Eugene Mayer
1999: Dr. Henry Indyk
1998: Mike Schiller
1997: Floyd Perry
1996: Steve Wightman
1995: Ed Birch
1994: Dr. Kent Kurtz
1993: Roger Bossard
1992: George Toma
1991: Murray Cook
1990: Harry Gill
1989: Dr. Fred Grau



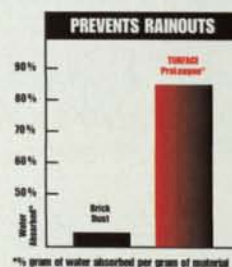
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