

Mower Efficiency: Properly Selecting the Right Mower for One's Needs

by Clover V. Shelton, Swanson Russell Associates

Efficient: adj. 1. Acting or producing effectively with a minimum of waste or unnecessary effort. 2. Exhibiting a high ratio of output to input.

When mowing a large number of different types of sports fields, groundskeepers often have a fleet of mowers to choose from upon walking into the storage shed. Is today the day for a large-deck pull-behind or a zero-turning radius mid-mount? What about the out-front or a walk-behind? The choices seem endless.

Most often, this choice is based on efficiency. When assessing efficiency of a mower, a groundskeeper often evaluates the following items:

1. Speed/maneuverability
2. Quality of cut
3. Lack of downtime
4. Multi-purpose use

Speed/Maneuverability

Bill Faherty, Director of Parks, Recreation and Forestry in Chippewa Falls, Wisc., is in the business of managing sports fields including their newest softball complex, four soccer fields and a baseball field. In addition to the Department's two 60-inch deck, zero-turn mid-mounts, they also use a large utility tractor with a pull-behind, 11-foot mowing deck, an industrial walk-behind and a traditional belly-mount tractor for mowing.

When it comes to speed and maneuverability, Faherty raves about his zero-turn machines. "They are faster than anything in their category, as far as maneuverability, backing-up and moving around. We have a traditional belly-mount, but the zero-turn is way ahead," he said.



Using the most efficient mower for a job will save time and increase the quality of your fields

Terry Sheerer, manager of the grounds department at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, also has to answer the efficiency question every day. He actively manages 300 acres of sports turf including 15 intramural fields as well as extramural playing fields for competition between colleges and universities. In addition, his crew maintains a football practice

field, a baseball and softball field, a women's soccer field and a high school football field, not to mention a golf practice driving range. Some intramural fields double as soccer and baseball fields.

Mowing each field an average of twice per week, Sheerer has a large fleet including a variety of mowers to

choose from. He uses large Jacobsen reel on the golf driving range. He also has an 11-foot pull-behind grooming mower for very large open spaces. "On other playing fields, where they play the actual games, we use the smaller out-front mowers with the 60-inch decks," he said.

Zero-radius turning mowers are often-used machines in his fleet, which includes two Exmarks and a Walker. Sheerer chooses zero-turn mowers for his softball and baseball fields as well as the practice football fields.

Sheerer speaks highly of his zero-turn machines, which all have smaller cutting decks. "They get around easier," Sheerer explains. "This is especially true in small areas.

Keeping the crew satisfied with the mowers is also an important consideration. "The only preference for our crew is the area they are mowing in," Sheerer explained. "If they are mowing a tight area, they like to run the zero-turns. A lot of area that we mow is right on top of the curbing where the zero-turns will do a lot nicer job. If they are mowing in an area that is fairly wide open, they would prefer to run the out-fronts."

Quality of cut

Especially on fields where the competition draws a crowd, the final look of the field is important to these maintenance professionals.

In Chippewa Falls, the Department adheres to high standards for their four-field softball complex. This is where Faherty's crew chooses zero-turn mid-mount mowers. "They do a fine job on specialty fields," Faherty explains. "We are running a top-notch complex and we want the grass looking great over time. We do not want to give up the nice grass over quickness. Our zero-turn mowers' cut is much better than the larger mowers."

Sheerer agrees, explaining, "Your smaller mowers seem to give you a better cut—and the appearance of the cut is important. They give us a nice striping effect."

Sheerer also is pleased that he can easily adjust the mowing height on his zero-turn mowers. "On soccer fields, they recommend 2 3/4-inches or 2 1/2-inches cut and some of our other areas, we may mow at three inches," he said.

Since Sheerer mows at regular intervals, he is pleased with the

mulching that his machines have offered. "We found in those zero-turns, and some of those other ones, that they do a pretty good job mulching," he said. "The mulching blade that we use and also the frequency in which we mow takes care of some of your mulching problem."

Due to this regular schedule of



F I V E

GREAT REASONS WHY
YOU SHOULD CONSIDER
BULL'S EYE Bermuda
FOR YOUR NEXT
PROJECT.

- Virtually No Seedheads
- Good Shade Tolerance
- Deep Blue-Green Color
- Medium-Wide Blade For Texture Contrast
- Can Be Mowed With Rotary or Reel



WEST COAST
TURF
GROWERS AND INSTALLERS OF
PREMIUM QUALITY SOD AND STOLONS

www.westcoastturf.com 760/360-5464 800/447-1840 FAX: 760/360-5616

Circle 105 on Inquiry Card



A mower's lack of downtime and its ability to be used in multiple settings increase efficiency.

mowing, Sheerer's crew seldom has to bag the clippings. "If we get into a fertilization period after a heavy rain and we cannot get on the field twice a week, we have to go back and run a sweeper on it," he explained. "But it is not often."

Lack of downtime

Overall, Sheerer finds that reliability has not been a problem with most of his mowers, especially the Exmark and John Deere brands. "We've got very good local support for that. We do have these two new Exmarks which we purchased from an excellent dealer in the area," he explained. "He gives us great service. I like the mowers, in fact I am probably going to spec a couple more this year."

To Faherty, it is imperative that the machines are easy to learn. If not, employees are busy training rather than working. He has found that even though the zero-turn mid-

UNCOVERED... COVERED...

EVERGREEN

The Turf Blanket the World Relies on

- Earlier spring green-up
- Faster seed germination
- Deeper root development
- Delays dormancy in fall
- Ideal winter blanket
- Best for quick turf repairs
- Available in any size
- 3 or 7 year warranty covers

EVERGREEN IS GREAT FOR BASEBALL FIELDS

COVERMASTER™
COVERMASTER
COVERMASTER

MASTERS IN THE ART OF SPORTS SURFACE COVERS

TO FIND OUT MORE,
 CALL TOLL FREE
1-800-387-5808

MEMBER
 Sports Turf Managers Association

WEB: www.covermaster.com
 E-MAIL: info@covermaster.com

COVERMASTER INC., 100 WESTMORE DR. 11-D, REXDALE, ON, M9V 5C3 TEL 416-745-1811. FAX 416-742-6837

Circle 106 on Inquiry Card.

mount mowers have different steering mechanisms than traditional mowers, he hasn't had a problem with training. "We use seasonal people and they seem to like them," he said. "The college kid can learn it and he likes it better than the steering wheel."

Multi-purpose use

Sheerer devotes certain machines to specific functions. "A certain part of the fleet has to be special equipment," he said. "Our 72-inch mower is also used for snow removal. Our smaller machines basically are a specialty [for mowing]. Once fall comes, we put them away. I think it is important that we do invest in those types of things."

For Faherty's crew, each machine has a purpose. The large utility tractor with pull-behind mowing deck is used for the large open spaces of the soccer fields where quality of cut isn't as important. The department also

uses it for aerating and over-seeding and they are considering purchasing a broom attachment for clearing the skating rinks.

The traditional out-front with 60-inch cutting deck is also used for rotor tilling and blowing snow. Though his zero-turns also have available attachments, Faherty has changed his mind about using attachments with mowers. "Sometimes we buy equipment for everything and it does not last—it's just too much for them," he said. "If we want to mow grass, let's buy mowers. If we wanted to blow snow, let's buy snow blowers."

For these decision-makers, choosing the right mower for their sports fields has come down to a question of efficiency. Is the mower fast and mobile? Does it produce a high-quality cut? Will I have to deal with downtime because of breakdown or training? Can or should I use my mower for a number of purposes?

Faherty summarized the objective of efficiency: "The goal is always trying to cut more grass with less time. Labor is your biggest cost and you do not want a mower that is too big to do the job. We are always trying to match the mowers to what we have to do."

Clover Shelton is a public relations writer for Swanson Russell Associates (SRA), a marketing communications firm in Lincoln, Neb. SRA serves clients in the turf, outdoor recreation and agriculture markets. www.sra-marketing.com 402-437-6400.

Quick Slit Seeder



Seeding is Believing

The Quick Slit Seeder follows the ground contours accurately and plants seeds at a constant depth in its own prepared mini seedbed. This unit is also a cultural tool in that it acts as a grass root pruner by cutting or breaking the grass plant roots. For the survival of the grass plant, it must immediately put all of its resources into growing new roots, resulting in stronger plants with better root structures.

BANNERMAN

41 Kelfield Street - Rexdale, ON CANADA
CDN 1-800-325-4871 - USA 1-800-665-2696
www.sportsturfmagic.com

- > Quick germination in higher yields.
- > Easy to calibrate.
- > Minimum surface disturbance.
- > Sowing varieties include (but not limited to) All types of seed, Grain, Pesticide, & Fertilizer Prills, Pelletized Lime, Diazinon 5.
- > Coverage Rates: 4lbs - 500lbs/acre
- > Insure seed/soil contact while maintaining constant seed depth.
- > Save 25% of seed with accurate calibration.



Circle 107 on Inquiry Card.