

Pitchers and catchers

By the time you read this, major league pitchers and catchers may already be at their respective Florida and Arizona winter homes, laying the foundation for their dreams of playing next October. For many readers this means the season has begun and imminent for many others.

You can throw the final logs on Hot Stove League fires when pitchers and catchers report; groundhog shadow or not, it's a promise of spring. We're all warmed by that affirmation.

While baseball's early birds begin stretching their wings on green turf between fresh white lines, recognition of the folks whose job it is to maintain that turf continues to grow. New STMA president Murray Cook (see opposite page) is certain to enhance the Association's professional reputation. He's a field consultant to Major League Baseball and last year provided field operations and management for four stadiums used in the World Cup baseball tournament held in South Korea (USA Baseball won the silver).

Murray's been in the sports turf industry for 27 years and began his career as head groundskeeper for a Class A team in Salem, VA. Today he is president of SPORTSTurf Services, which provides design and maintenance programs for sports facilities.

"Our organization is growing very quickly and yet our image in the world of sports does not represent the importance of what we provide for athletes and team owners alike. My vision is to see our organization become the recognized professional sports field association around the world," Murray says. "The certification program is key to our professional development as sports turf managers. It goes hand in hand with the image of our professionalism."

Of course no matter how many safe and attractive fields you create or who knows it from Winter Haven to Walla Walla, those ultimately in charge of pitchers and catchers, the owners and players' union, need to stop crossing up their signals. The disharmony among our National Pastime's caretakers has turned into a rhubarb that I, for one, am sick of watching.

I think there's no question the imbalance between team revenues is hurting the goodness of the game, and having an owner disguised as commissioner of the sport leaves no one to look out for the fans, even in principle. And the players' bleating about "fair market value" grows quickly tiresome to the vast American middle class. We are left to wonder what's the difference, really, between \$20 or \$60 or \$127 million?

The stormcloud hovering over baseball cannot dampen the optimism for the home team that many of us feel as spring beckons. This may be however, as Samuel Johnson said when discussing a gentleman who had been very unhappily married yet married immediately after his wife died, the triumph of hope over experience.

Your fields will be ready come spring, I'm certain. I'm not so sure about the game.



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