

Travelin' man

BY MEL LANFORD

In 1999 my wife, Teresa, and I made a decision that changed and enriched our lives. We sold all of our household possessions, purchased an RV, secured corporate sponsors, and created the Ace of Diamonds Tour. Three years later, I'm still traveling. I've been privileged to meet some true characters, many of whom have become my teachers and keep me informed of interesting issues and facilities that have deepened my appreciation and love for all things related to baseball.

Each month, "On the Road with the Ace" will profile different people and places that I encounter on my travels. So, sit back and ride along with me for a few minutes while I introduce you to two dedicated colleagues who share your passion for sports fields. I enjoy meeting fellow professionals and learning about your different methods, challenges, and personalities and I look forward to visiting a ballpark near you soon.

Building a strong work ethic

"I'd give an arm and a leg for these work ethics."

Hoover, AL—Athletic field manager Kenny Shaw of the Hoover Board of Education maintains two very high profile sports complexes, the Spain Sports Complex and the Hoover High School Complex. Both facilities have eight fields each and the \$55 million, newly constructed Spain facility includes some \$10.5 million in field construction.

Kenny took on this 16-field responsibility a year and a half ago. With no labor force and limited equipment, he tackled the grow-in and maintenance by himself, welcoming volunteer help from industry partners in the evenings and weekends. He has since assembled a four-man crew and acquired the proper equipment and materials to effectively maintain his fields with a low-labor budget. Like most people in the profession,

Kenny's passion for sports field management comes from a lifelong love of sports.

"If it had a ball involved, I played it," Kenny says. "Working these facilities allows me to remain involved in sports every day."

Kenny isn't your typical amateur athlete turned athletic field manager. Plagued for more than 20 years with avascular neurosis, a condition that causes deterioration of cartilage and bone, the 37-year-old married man underwent surgery Feb. 4 to replace his left hip. After missing only 1 week of work, he returned mid-February on crutches to do whatever he could until he recuperates. Six weeks later, the other hip will be replaced. Kenny is more concerned today about the development of his winter ryegrass than he is about his surgeries. In my opinion, Kenny deserves the "Ironman in Sports Field Management" Award.

Excited about the newly formed Alabama STMA, currently supported by Alabama vendors and educators, Kenny believes that athletic field managers have an excellent opportunity at STMA for education and networking that is vital for career success.

Nashville, TN—At an early age, most young people have role models they admire. Whether it's a parent, preacher, coach, teacher, or relative, someone instills certain values and sets examples for a good work ethic.

Marty Kaufman, assistant sports field manager for the Tennessee Titans, was raised near an Amish farm community in central Ohio. These devoted farmers and craftsmen set a high standard of discipline and work. When Marty was not involved in school or sports, his spare time was spent at his grandfather's farm, just down the road from his own home.

Grandpa lost his left arm as a young man in a farming accident and had to improvise. When he would do mechanical work on the old tractor or farm implements, Grandpa would use his right hand and anything else, his chin, teeth or chest, to get something done. Marty was amazed watching this as a child, but looking back, amazement has turned to respect for Grandpa and a strong appreciation and understanding for what hard work really is.

During the off-season, Marty spends his time arranging upcoming events for the Tennessee Valley STMA, for which he currently serves as program director under president-elect Bob Elliott of Nashville.

Where did you get your work ethic?

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Mel Lanford, a 30-year veteran of the groundskeeping industry, is the creator and host of the Ace of Diamonds Tour, sponsored in part by Diamond Pro Professional Groundskeeping Products, a division of TXI. Mel travels across the United States year-round presenting hands-on seminars, demonstrating the proper infield and sports turf maintenance materials, equipment and techniques to athletic field managers. For more information, visit www.diamondpro.com or call 800-228-2987.

