

president's message

Guardians of the game

When was the last time you went to a professional or collegiate sporting event and the game, as it was contested on the field, was the only attraction? Bet it's been a while.

I take the risk of being not in touch with the times, but I believe we have lost something, not only in sports but in society as well.

The games we have loved all our lives are in danger of becoming lost in the constantly increasing jumble of activities and sideshows surrounding them. Just for the record, here are some things about today's sports I don't like:

- * Public address announcers who can turn one syllable into four when introducing a batter or recounting a play, the louder the better
- * World Series games played at night
- * Talking scoreboards that include fireworks
- * Game times set by TV
- * Stadiums with a roof
- * Players and fans who do not have reverence for the game
- * Anyone, on or off the field, who puts themselves above the game
- * Recorded music at games
- * Stadiums that could be confused for a shopping mall

Once upon a time, the game and its purity was what it was all about. You went to the game to enjoy the experience with your friends or family, to escape from reality. Ballparks and stadiums were more passive. They weren't a place where my participation needed to be active, or important in helping ensure my favorite team's success. You went to appreciate the complexities of strategy, the fairness of the contest and the athletic skill it took to be successful as a participant. Ballparks were places where heroes were crowned on merit, not places to be used as a stage where the hero can crown himself and have the media help make him bigger than life. Crowns were honestly earned, but rarely bestowed.

As you entered the stadium, you entered another, more pleasant, world. The grass was always greener and the sky was bluer. They don't call ballparks "cathedrals of the game" for nothing.

"I think a baseball field must be the most beautiful thing in the world. It's so honest and precise," said Lowell Cohn in *The Temple of Baseball*.

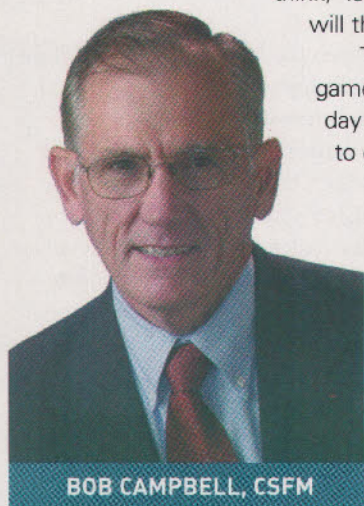
During timeouts or between innings, you could actually talk with your neighbor. You weren't blasted out of your seat by loud music or bothered by some foolish sideshow at every opportunity. The person sitting beside you was probably someone who paid for his or her own ticket instead of receiving the ticket as part of a promotion of some silly kind. Fans were fans of the team as well as fans of the game.

"I can sit in a ballpark after a game and love looking at the field," one observer of the game has said. "Everybody's gone, and the ballpark is empty, and I'll sit there. I sit there and think, 'Is this as close to heaven as I'm going to get?' Or, 'If I get to heaven, will there be baseball?'"

The game was enough. The players were honored to be "playing" a game that we all had a love affair with and dreamed of playing from the day we could throw and run. It had a special feeling that you didn't want to end. I am afraid those days are gone forever.

It seems that recently I've heard more talk about the "integrity of the game." As sports field managers, we are the literally the last line of defense. Most of us got started in this profession because of a love of the games in their purest sense. The game is the key thing, whether played in huge stadiums by

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BOB CAMPBELL, CSFM

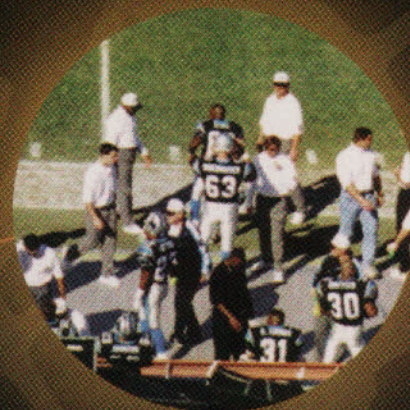
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stma in action

BY ERIC SCHRODER

KAFMO conference plays to SRO crowd

Keystone Athletic Field Managers Organization (KAFMO) President Dan Douglas' sense of humor is legendary in turf management circles in the same way the Enola Gay is legendary in Hiroshima. But it didn't deter hundreds of Pennsylvania turf managers from attending the STMA chapter's 8th annual KAFMO/PRPS (Pennsylvania Recreation & Park Society) Athletic Field Conference last February.

More than 40 exhibitors, many of them sponsors of the event, helped attract a record number of attendees. They also came to hear from speakers that included STMA President Bob Campbell, straight-shooting Penn State assistant professor Dr. Andy McNitt, and professional turf managers Mike Boekholder (Phillies), Jim Koontz (2003 scholastic football FOY winner), and Tony Leonard (Eagles).

Before the presentations, Charlie Vestal, the region's Turface rep, announced that everyone in attendance would be eligible for a \$1,000 scholarship to be used for any turf education format in the name of the late Terry Mellor, brother of Boston Red Sox turf manager Dave Mellor.

KAFMO donations help support research at Penn State, said McNitt, who added that most of his department's funding comes "from crumbs off the golf table."

McNitt's said during his "Maintaining Multi-Use Fields" presentation that personnel is the number one priority in where to spend your money, including paying for continuing ed for your crew. Money for mowing is next. "Mowing has to be in your bud-

get; if you're mowing once a week, mow twice. If you're mowing twice, mow three times," he recommended, adding, "Mow at whatever height you choose but mow at that height all the time, just mow more often when you need to."

Ask booster clubs to help raise money for a new mower, he said, and don't forget about the band's club. Other tips for multi-use fields from McNitt: After personnel and mowing, your next most important expense should be fertilizer, especially nitrogen fertilization. "After the first killing frost in fall is the day to fertilize with a quick-release nitrogen because the roots continue to grow," he said.

"Every day is a good day to seed," said McNitt, "and use high quality seed. Don't worry about mixing varieties . . . you must overseed high-use fields, preferably with ryegrass."

Regarding irrigation, McNitt quotes Dr. Dave Minner: "All fields need some drought stress. If you never see any, you're watering too much."

Bob Campbell spoke eloquently about turf managers being the "guardians of the game" (see p. 7) during his presentation on turf managers' "survival." Among his thoughts: Remember that today's game is the most important one; keep photo records, especially to show bosses what's left behind after concerts, for example, and how you returned field to playability; establish realistic expectations; and finally, Tennessee Volunteer orange-colored field covers actually work better than other colors (Minner's done the research to prove it!) **ST**

president's message (cont'd)

(Continued from page 7) multi-million dollar athletes in the circus atmosphere that surrounds it or by a group of kids who are playing for the pure joy of competition. The game has to be protected. The job of protecting the actual game might be left in our hands, more now than ever before.

In our profession, we continue to accept the challenge of providing a safe and fair field worthy of the game, regardless of constantly increasing challenges. We are the ones who ensure the bases are 90 feet apart, the mound is 10 inches high, and that the football field is exactly 160 feet wide. Things have changed tremendously in sports. Our respect for the game and professionalism must shine through in everything we do.

That's our calling and needs to continue to be our passion. I think it's become a great part of our

challenge. The "game" needs us more than ever right now, and we owe it to the game to preserve its integrity and its fairness.

Part of the new STMA tagline states that we are partners of the game, and in a true sense we are partners with the games we are part of. Maybe it would be more appropriate to say that we are guardians of the game. For this moment in time, we are stewards of special places where memories are made every day for the ages.

Bob