

Managing low-budget soccer facilities

BY KEVIN I. MEREDITH

That headline an oxymoron you say? How in the world can someone even think that working with a low budget is beneficial? The answer is in the eyes of the beholder; it's a matter of perception. Focusing on the benefits of managing a low budget facility can help you overcome the job's shortcomings.

Keep in mind that first and foremost, the goal (no pun intended) of a soccer field maintenance program is the safety of the players and fans. If you think about it, the low-budget facility has the huge advantage in fan seating; more than likely there is none!

Experienced soccer parents and fans know this and carry chairs and blankets with them. I can think of three advantages of having little or no seating: Maintenance is reduced with one less area to trim and clean; without permanent seating there is one less object for a player to injure him or herself on; and, a spectator cannot slip or fall off bleachers that are not there.

Wow! What an advantage it is to be small budget.

Here is another benefit of managing a low budget facility [DASH HERE] any improvements you make are more likely to be noticed and praised. It is a lot easier to continue to improve a lower budget facility where the changes are more noticeable. Larger facilities expect and demand high quality conditions. The bar is set much higher and any improvements are harder to notice.

It is also a winning situation if the weather cooperates and your turf remains green and lush for a month longer than normal. The same conditions on high-end fields wouldn't make much difference at the end of the month. The rain in this case makes you a hero and little difference in the other. This is what is meant by, "a matter of perspective."

Low budget does not mean that low spots and divots on the field are not filled. It does not mean that goals are not secured and goal areas dressed on a regular basis. What it means is that people exhibit an entirely different expectation level when comparing low and high budget fields.

Take irrigation for example: On fields with irrigation systems the expectation is for thick lush well-groomed turf. No one looks at the maintenance and time invested in operating that system. They don't look at the liability of the heads in the ground or the initial cost of the system. If you do not have irrigation none of issues are of any concern. What is a huge plus it is to be a low-budget manager.

Another area that can be seen as a benefit is the type of mowing equipment and the frequency of mowing. With just one small (25-35 hp) tractor, and a 6-foot rear mounted finish mower you can do all the fields and perimeter areas. With the same tractor you can aerate, drag a mat to break down the cores, use a hopper spreader for fertilizing and if need be, mount a 3-point hitch sprayer for pesticide applications.

If you are really lucky you will have a loader for the front to help with repairs on the field. It is considerably less expensive, and less complicated, to have one major piece of equipment rather than deal with multiple units. Speaking of mowing, on a high profile field where the expectations are almost unrealistic the turf is mowed three times a week. Low budget might be happy with four times a month. High budget fertilization is once a month, low budget might be twice a year.

When it comes to field markings the low budget facility wins hands down. Short of permanent lines it is possible to have long lasting lines by using solvent



based paints rather than water based. The solvents kill the grass plants that they are applied to. Water based paints adhere to the leaf surface and grow out with the leaf. When mowed the portion of the leaf with the paint is mowed off and repainting becomes necessary. Think about having to paint the fields once a month rather than once a week. That is not being lazy it is being efficient. It does not compromise safety and saves a heck of a lot of time.

The adage "time is money" certainly applies to managing a low budget facility. Without a lot of money available creative ways to save time are invaluable. One way to enhance your manpower situation is to enlist some volunteers. There are many parents that would be more than happy to help raise the quality of the turf that their children play on. It is up to you to share your passion with them. Passion is infectious.

Another great way to aid your cause is to ask for donations if people cannot give their time. It is amazing how willing people are to give to a cause that they think is noble and just. The most important part of the volunteer and donation system is the thanks received during and at the end of a project. A few pizzas and some soda go a long way in fostering good will and repeat help. If no one else in your organization rewards them make it your job to do it. A couple of dollars out of your pocket will save you hours of time.

Educate yourself and anyone else that will listen about growing and maintaining healthy turf. Join STMA or your state turf grass organization. Go out and meet others that take care of turf for a living. Network like crazy.

Finally, remember Passion, Pride and Perseverance. Passion is the energy source to accomplish your dreams. Pride is the reward felt for accomplishing your dreams. Perseverance is the tether that holds your dreams. All three P's work together to help you accomplish your goals. **ST**
Kevin Meredith is owner and turf manager at the National Soccer Hall of Fame in Oneonta, NY.



Sports turf in Spain

BY MIKE TARANTINO

I had the opportunity to travel to Spain with the Nomads girls under-18 and girls under-16 (my daughter Kelli's team) when they participated in the 10th Costa Blanca Cup played in the city of Benidorm.

While I was busy trying to come up with ways to make this an educational trip for Kelli, e.g., speaking Spanish, etc., I realized I could make it educational for myself as well.

We began in Barcelona where the teams trained at El Montanya resort, which has a full soccer training facility on the grounds. Using an interpreter, I spoke with members of the grounds staff about their maintenance practices. Their turf is a mix

of Bermudagrass, Kikuyu, and ryegrass, which they affectionately refer to as a "Heinz 57" and say it's the best they can do.

El Montanya goes through extreme temperature changes, teens in the winter and 90+ degrees in the summer. I learned that this facility is used for training only so that's why the maintenance is minimal. Weekly reel mowing, fertilization every 6 weeks dictated by weather conditions, and irrigation (through aboveground impact heads) as needed was about it.

We bussed to our game sites, built with Spanish federal government funds, and then turned over to local governments to operate and maintain.

Our first game was at a beautiful venue in Benidorm that featured mostly well groomed Bermuda. They mowed this field three times a (continued on page 35)

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Latest weather technology for turf managers

BY CHRIS WHITTINGHILL

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For sports turf managers weather technology offers up-to-the-minute weather information including the ability to accurately gauge rainfall and severe weather, monitor lightning, check wind speed, and keep tabs on the heat index. Localized forecasts provide accurate outlooks at hourly intervals as far as 10 days out. Rainfall details on how much rain will fall and how much is already on the ground helps managers determine irrigation schedules.

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Chris Whittinghill is with Meteorlogix,
www.meteorlogix.com.

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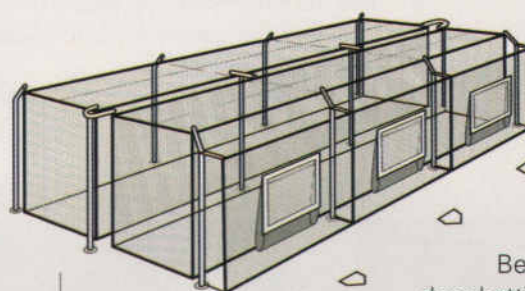
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SAFE Wants to Hear from YOU!

The Foundation for Safer Athletic Field Environments (SAFE) was created by the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) to provide research, educational programs and scholarships geared to sports fields. The SAFE Foundation Board of Trustees continues to move forward on following the parameters set to help SAFE meet its the goals established during their spring Board Meeting in Chicago.

The Board recognizes the fact that SAFE has much work to complete before it can supply the sports turf industry with the desired level of programs. Additional funding is needed to fulfill all three arms of our mission: the scholarship program, research and education. SAFE's major thrust for 2004 is seeking greater funding for sports specific research, finalizing the research criteria, and beginning assessment of research projects for funding. The Board continues to make positive steps in all of these areas. Progress has already been made on the research criteria and development continues on the forms for research grant applications.

SAFE encourages sports turf managers to provide their input on specific areas of sports turf related research needs by contacting SAFE by phone at 800-323-3875 or via email: SAFE@st.ohmcoxmail.com.

These research suggestions will augment the information gathered in

an earlier call for research recommendations. It is the intent of the SAFE Board and the SAFE Research Committee to identify key areas of research needs and then solicit these needs to the researchers. Thus it is important that this information on key areas of research needs come from STMA members, STMA Chapters and other sports turf managers. SAFE will focus on research that is applicable and repeatable; practical research that meets the needs of sports turf managers.

Next, significant scholarship funding is available thanks to the funds raised through the combination of the Jacobsen-sponsored SAFE Golf Tournament, and the Raffle, Silent and Live Auctions held in conjunction with the STMA Conference held in San Diego last January. The SAFE Board has authorized the allocation of up to \$18,000 in direct Scholarship dollars and funds toward travel and lodging expenses to allow the recipients to attend the STMA 2005 Conference in Phoenix. Scholarship application information and application forms are sent directly to STMA Student and Educator members as well as to 2- and 4-year Colleges and Universities offering turf programs. These materials also are posted in the SAFE section of the STMA website.

(continued from page 31) week with a reel mower and have an aggressive fertilization program, including applying a high nitrogen product during the peak growing months. The program includes winter and spring applications of high phosphorus and potassium, supplemented with iron and sulfur. A combination of core and slice aerations are done bi-monthly, based on use.



Topdressing material is applied after each core aeration with seeding of an annual rye during winter. The irrigation system is conventional, controller, remote control valves and gear-driven rotors. The system is adjusted daily according to weather conditions and scheduled events. The site is used for club and semi-pro soccer, as well as track and field events.

The same landscape management company that maintains this facility also

handled the field at our next venue, Alfaz Annexo.

We then went to Alfaz Estadio, which had two soccer fields that needed care. Local volunteers maintain this field and so there is no maintenance program or resources available, other than donations. The volunteers filled low spots with topsoil, and most areas had good stands of the Heinz 57 played fine.

Our final stop was Calpe, which was another impressive facility, with one turf field and one synthetic. Our game was at night and so there were no grounds personnel around to talk to, but the turf was Bermuda mowed tight, and it was a deep shade of green indicating some fertilization and irrigation was being used.

Whether it is wear spots, lack of resources, or a lack of trained professionals, the one constant with turf management in the US is we all have similar problems. **ST**

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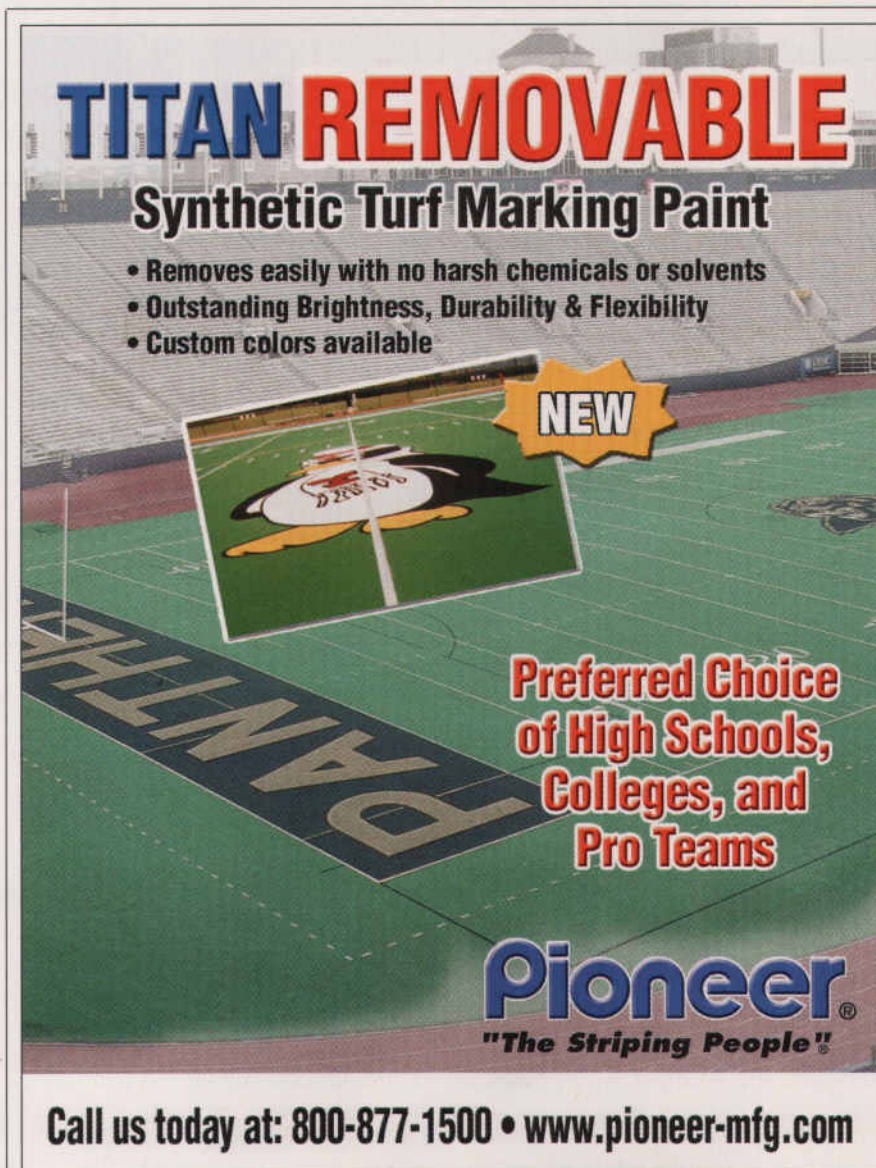
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