

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**
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