

from the sidelines

# Former SRI exec responds

**Comments on the** bankruptcy of the synthetic turf company SRI Sports printed here in recent issues prompted a phone call from Jim Savoca. He's been in the industry for 25 years including the last 9 years as VP of sales for SRI. Jim now is working with Sportexe (jim.savoca@sportexe.com):

"I want to set the record straight because I care about this industry and the clients that purchased SRI Sports fields. These are my opinions only. I am not speaking for Sportexe or SRI.

"SRI was a successful company. The growth and profits went up every year until 2003. That year they got hit by a 'perfect storm'—low prices for filled turf, high installation costs, a highly leveraged corporate structure, and management upheaval. It resulted in a loss; the Wall Street backers of SRI got nervous and took them under Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection to make sure they came out whole. These guys showed no compassion for anyone. They fired us with 1 day's notice and no severance pay, no vacation pay, and no insurance.

"I feel horrible for the SRI customers, but there is hope. In many cases, other entities might be tied to the SRI turf warranty. Some Payment and Performance Bonds commit the bonding companies to all the terms of the specifications and contract, including the turf warranty. I'd advise owners to have their legal department check the documents to look for linkage on the warranty.

"The other bit of good news lies in the very nature of the filled fields. These fields have an extremely low warranty exposure, and I cannot think of a single field that had to be replaced due to catastrophic failure.

"Historically, seam repairs have accounted for 90 percent of the SRI warranty expenditures. Most seam repairs are small and can be handled by your staff with a Shop Vac, Gorilla glue, and cinder blocks for a few hundred dollars. Occasionally, a full field re-seaming (\$30,000-\$40,000 fix performed by professional turf installers) is required. For that reason, I would advise owners to create a \$30,000 contingency fund for these warranty problems. In all likelihood, you would have the bulk of the funds to use on the turf replacement at the end of its 8- or 10-year life cycle.

"With regard to SRI using road base for its vertically draining subbase (reported here in July issue) that is nonsense. We did much of the original work on these bases going back to Monsanto in the early 1980s. To build a base that will last 20-30 years you need the proper stone sieve and gradation to achieve compaction, drainage, and planarity. SRI built over 150 bases during my years there and we didn't use road base."

Readers may notice several subtle changes in this issue. Our featured sections now are titled "Green Science," "Turf Maintenance Equipment," "Irrigation/Drainage," and the familiar "Around the Grounds." We hope these categories will prove useful.



ERIC SCHRODER, EDITOR

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