

STM uses one machine at UMBC

BY TARA DEERING

With more than 15 acres of athletic fields to maintain, you'd think Eric Plitt, sports turf manager for the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), would have a fleet of equipment to perform his score of daily tasks. But believe it or not, Plitt has turned his operation into a one-machine show.

Plitt and his staff of three are responsible for all of the athletic grounds maintenance throughout the year. When Plitt first arrived at the university, the only equipment his department had was a few mowers and a utility vehicle. He says whenever they needed a loader to unload sports materials or perform other grounds maintenance tasks, he would have to borrow equipment from the campus grounds department.

Then about a year ago, Plitt was allocated money to purchase new equipment. At first, he says he considered purchasing several different pieces of equipment to dedicate to specific tasks as diverse as spraying and snowplowing. "We were also looking at some type of angle broom, which came as one unit, and that would have been another piece of equipment. It was adding up to be a lot of stuff," he says.

Then Plitt read about the Toolcat 5600 utility work machine, which has the features of a utility loader, pickup truck, and attachment carrier. "After looking at this, it knocked off like five pieces of equipment, and it actually was going to cost less to get it," he says.

But the athletic director had to see for himself that the utility work machine could do the work of several pieces of equipment before signing off on the purchase. "I talked it up because he was a little leery at first. Then I had the dealer bring one down, and I just drove around doing odd things that we could have never done before," Plitt says. "He was sold."

Plitt says that recently the machine helped clear overgrowth on a large hill at the university's soccer stadium. He attached the mower to the 46-hp 5600 and drove it straight up the hill. He says he was impressed by how the turf tires on the machine provided added traction while exerting low ground pressure, enabling him to easily climb the hill while causing minimal ground disturbance. "It would have taken three guys probably six hours to cut weeds on that hill, and we knocked that whole thing out in about an hour and a half," he says.

Like many universities with sports facilities, the UMBC athletic grounds department often receives deliveries of palletized lawn materials. This is where the pallet forks come in handy, Plitt says. With the pallet forks and the machine's 1,500-pound rated operating capacity, he says he can easily unload and haul topsoil and other materials where they need to go.

"That definitely saves us a lot of time," Plitt says. "Before we would have loaded the pickup truck by hand from our warehouse, and then drove it all the way back down to where it had to go and unloaded it by hand."

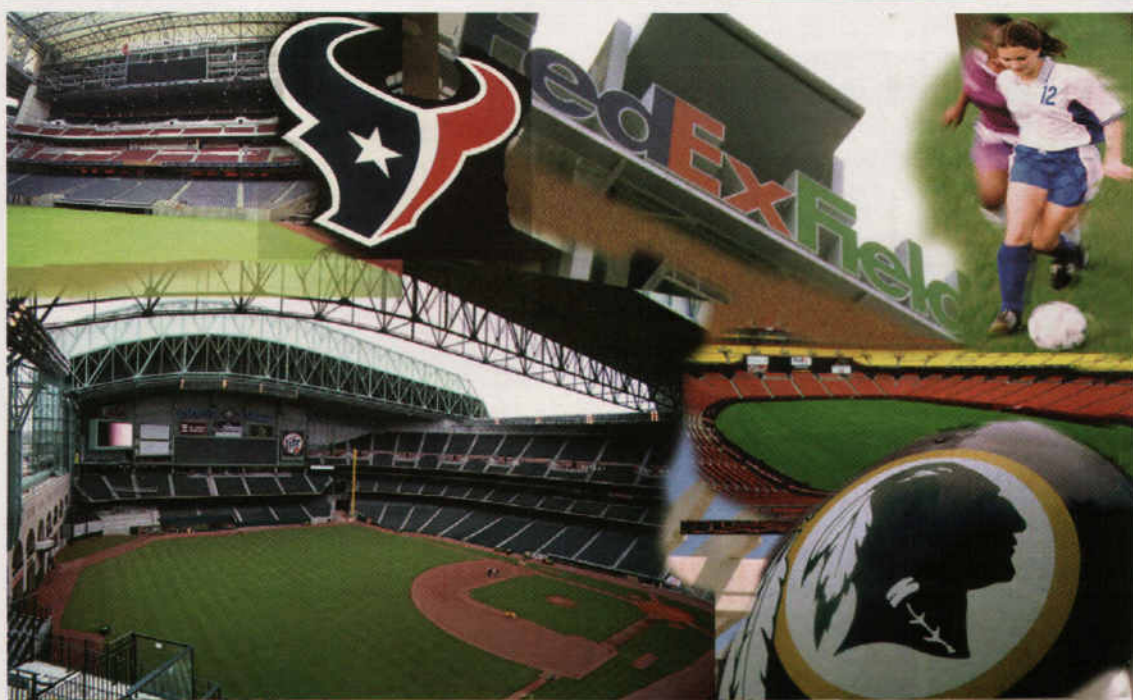
Using the pickup truck to unload and haul materials also didn't allow them access to confined areas in and around the athletic facilities. Plitt says the 60.5-inch wide machine fits through the softball and baseball fields' fence gates.

Plitt also uses the machine to remove snow, with both the angle broom attachment and the blade.

Plitt doesn't view the enclosed cab as a luxury but rather a necessity for staying efficient year-round. For example, he says, the heat not only helps keep the windows defrosted in the winter, but it also enables operators to work longer by keeping them warm.

"I would say we're at least 40 percent more efficient than we were before," he says. **ST**

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