

More lessons learned in 25 years with STMA

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This is a continuation of the January Q&A where we were discussing 25 lessons learned in 25 years with STMA (http://www.greenmediaonline.com/uploads/ST/features/0601_qa.asp).

A few lessons from George Toma kept popping into my head this month; maybe it was watching the Super Bowl or just visiting with him at the STMA meeting in Orlando. This also gives me the opportunity to personally thank Mr. Toma for all those sports turf managers he has mentored and for the lessons he has shared with me over the years, including a few that deservedly required a trip to the woodshed. The STMA national conference is a great place to interact with the emerging talent and proven stars of our industry. A simple introduction and a handshake are all it takes to meet and exchange ideas with any of your fellow members. Mark your calendars for STMA's 18th Annual Conference & Exhibition in San Antonio, January 17-21, 2007.

Lesson #6: High seeding rates are justified in many athletic field situations. Twenty years ago we all thought Mr. Toma was nuts for seeding perennial ryegrass at 20 lbs/1000 sq. ft., but he certainly knew what he was doing as he quickly made worn-out fields Super Bowl-ready in a matter of weeks. Most sports turf managers are not getting ready for the Super Bowl but they have realized that repeated and higher than normal seeding rates are needed to continually keep grass establishing on intensely used areas of the field.

During in-season traffic single or multiple seedings may total 7, 35, and 35 lbs. of seed/1000 sq. ft. for Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue, and perennial ryegrass, respectively. Recent research indicates a benefit from seeding rates as high as 60 and 100 lbs. of seed/1000 sq. ft. for tall fescue and perennial ryegrass, respectively. For even faster establishment try seed pre-germination, another Toma discovery that has helped many sports turf managers over the years (<http://turfgrass.hort.iastate.edu/extension/EGathfldpregerm.pdf>).

Lesson #7: You should first learn to read the water needs of your turf before using the automated controls of an irrigation system. Advances in irrigation uniformity, controls, and water saving features have been substantial over the past two decades. In the world of sport fields many of our management practices are aimed at force-growing grass to hasten turf recovery. Unfortunately this can lead to over-irrigation if your philosophy is "more water means better growth and recovery so I had better use a little more."

As a general rule you should realize that if your turf never wilts then you are probably over-watering. Mild turf wilt is important because it signals a hormonal response in the plant to grow roots. It also assures that aeration of the soil has been maximized. Look for foot printing and turf purpling as indicators of beneficial wilting that signals the proper time to irrigate.

The old adage of "deep and infrequent watering" applies here; water the field to recharge the soil moisture, wait until wilt occurs to force root growth, then water the field again. After mastering this intuitive skill you will have a better understanding of how to use all of the modern irrigation features that use ET and water scheduling.

Lesson #8: "It is the man in manager that makes the difference." It was 1985 when I first heard Mr. Toma utter those words, which proved to be a lesson for me over the years. Of course, 20 years later that catchy little phrase encompasses both women and men in the sports turf profession. On and off the field women in STMA are clearly breaking barriers and contributing to a better organization. Some of those leaders who have influenced my world are Abby McNeal, CSFM, Lynda Wightman, Kim Heck, Connie Rudolph, CSFM, Pam Sherratt, Heather Nabozny, Theresa Bayrer, and Debbie Kneeshaw. These women and others like them are breaking barriers and paving the way for new leaders in sports turf management.

Gender aside, employers should realize that there is a new breed of sports turf manager that comes with proven experience and the title of Certified Sports Field Manager, CSFM. They sit at the top of the heap with experience and professional dedication. The value added CSFM should be the type of individual you seek when looking for the sports turf manager that makes a difference. The message in this lesson is that you need to seek talented people with good personal skills to fill your positions and then step aside and let them do their jobs. Simply put, as Floyd Perry reminds us, it's "hire smart and work easy."

I really enjoy discovering the strategies of different sports turf managers and how that shapes their overall philosophy. Whether your sports turf career is short or long do take the time to reflect and put in writing the lessons you have learned. Your sports turf philosophy can be found in those lessons learned. The details of field management may develop specific strategies, but revealing a sports field management philosophy will require a little self analysis of how you use those lessons to solve problems and influence your career, along with those around you.

I'm always interested in your strategies and philosophies, so don't feel that a question is required to chat me up on the email. ■