

Lessons learned in 25 years with STMA, Part VI

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Lesson #17: All athletic fields can benefit from **deep aerification**. Sports turf managers are fascinated with sticking steel deeper (6 to 12 inches) into the ground to make large channels to facilitate air, water, and nutrient intake into the soil profile. Compaction and hardness are immediately reduced and beneficial root growth is often observed within the deep mechanical voids. Some machines use deep, solid, or hollow tines, such as the VertiDrain, Soil Reliever, Terra Spike, while others like the AerWay and Sisis shatter the ground, and still others slice into the surface and redistribute soil from the rootzone onto the surface as a topdressing, like the Koro topdressing recycler.

Lesson #18: Contract services vs. purchasing equipment. Sometimes high purchase costs of coring, seeding, and spraying equipment may be difficult to justify, especially if it is only used a few times each year. Contracting may also be useful if your personnel and facilities are not certified to apply or store pesticides. Contract services can provide custom application of these field management practices without the burden of overhead costs and regulation. Choose a reputable company with specific expertise in athletic field management. Contracting can serve as a stepping stone towards developing your own "in house" sports field management program with the goal of having a Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) to professionally manage your facility.

Lesson #19: One synthetic rubber-infill field somewhere on your facility **can greatly improve the condition of all your grass fields** since it provides a place to play or practice during inclement weather or when grass fields need a period of recovery.

Lesson #20: There are many mowing rules that we have discussed over the years (http://www.greenmediaonline.com/uploads/ST/features/0501_qa.asp). When irrigation is not limited I suggest that you **select a mowing height** that

best suits the playing condition for your particular sport and then **stay within 15% of that desired mowing height**. Bermudagrass and some cool-season grass situations will benefit from "scalp mowing" to reduce the "puffiness" of the surface or in severe situations when you are renovating and smoothing fields with aerification and topdressing.

Lesson #21: My Dad often said **"Keep your eyes and ears open, boy."** After a few years as a young professor I thought I knew it all. But most of the important things I learned from you, when I quietly listen and observe how you do those amazing things to make grass grow, or make people listen, or get things done with limited resources. So when I borrow your ideas and pass them on to others in the profession, remember, that that is the greatest form of flattery I can offer you.

Getting older I sometimes forget where I stole some of the ideas. So do me a favor and don't forget to brag on yourself a little. I like to hear how you have been involved with the changes in sports turf management over the past 25 years. Sometimes the failures along the way to success are more meaningful and fun to talk about.

Lesson #22: Over the past 25 years there have been **many new products** developed specifically for the sports turf industry. Take a minute to look at the wide array of products that support this industry and are featured in this magazine. Sports turf management has truly become a highly specialized and definable commodity within the turf and landscape sector.

From the sponsors in this magazine you can choose products to mow, water, fertilize, cultivate, sweep, topdress, seed, or sod a field. You can contract with a consultant or field management company to provide services or make recommendations or completely build and rebuild your field. You can buy paint, and painting equipment, and even a plant growth regulator to help you save on painting and mowing. There are even covers to make your field grow better when it is too cold. There are many new and exciting products to help you do your job better and many turf managers are developing good working relationships with manufacturers to help them improve and develop new products. ■