

From the Sidelines

Commercial seminars often worth your time



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One of the fun parts of my job is getting “on the ground” at some of America’s great sporting venues, usually due to a commercially sponsored event. Sometimes I even get some special treatment like a few years ago at the then-new Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia. When the group toured the stadium, I instead joined Eagles’ turf manager Tony Leonard to visit the working innards of “The Linc.” (I’m like those faux VIPs in the car insurance ads.) This past summer the folks at Bayer Environmental Science sponsored a “Southern Sports Turf” in Charlotte at Bank of America Stadium, home of the NFL Panthers. (Quick trivia: what was the original name of this stadium?*) We spent some time both on the stadium field (Voyager hybrid bermudagrass, which Panthers’ head groundskeeper Tom Vaughan says has held up well over 3 years with resodding needed only in the east corner, where it freezes in winter), and the nearby practice fields (Tifway 419, called a “workhorse” grass by Vaughan). The 33-acre facility that Vaughan maintains along with right-hand man Adam White also features a Prestige infill synthetic surface.

“We try to keep the same cultural practices for the game field and our practice fields but of course the practice fields get a lot more use,” Vaughan told about 40 sports turf managers who attended the session. Vaughan’s been head guy for 5 years after 3 years as assistant groundskeeper. “We killed our ryegrass on the practice field later than usual this year, the third week of June,” Vaughan told the gathering. “We verticut every May and use a 50% controlled release nitrogen, custom-blended product after that about every two weeks. And we use Primo, lots of it, from March until mid-June.”

Before the team arrives from training camp, Vaughan mows at 1/2 inch “to tighten up the turf” then as the season approaches he ups that to 3/4 inch. After overseeding with ryegrass in early September, he goes up to 7/8 inch. The fields are aerified two or three times a year, including one “drill & fill” treatment to help drainage.

Before the tour, this free event included presentations by Drs. Fred Yelverton, Grady Miller and research specialist Casey Reynolds, all from North Carolina State, on issues such as transition management of bermudagrass sports turf and traffic tolerance.

Next time you get an invite to one of these commercially sponsored events, I encourage you to accept. Sure, the hosts want to sell you something but most often they also offer great information just for showing up—advice for no price.

*Ericsson Stadium—are those naming rights really worth it?

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