



Spartans, Fouty win College Football Field of the Year

Amy Fouty, CSFM, and her crew at Michigan State University, and their turf at Spartan Stadium, won the 2005 Sports Turf Managers Association's College Football Field of the Year award. Fouty credits "many individuals' hard work and dedication, from our president to the student body" for help in winning the award.

Michigan State's stadium opened in 1923 with a capacity of 14,000, followed by renovations in 1935, 1948, and 1956. In 1957 the upper decks were added, raising capacity to 76,000, and Spartan Stadium became its official name. Capacity today is 75,000 and the facility boasts state of the art video boards, club level seats, etc.

For 46 years the turf was natural grass on native soil and then artificial turf was put in in 1969. A new natural surface was installed in 2002

via the Green Tech ITM Modular Field System. Trays of turf that had been established from seed at MSU's Hancock Research Facility the previous year were moved into the stadium, 4,800 "modules" in all. This same turf faces its fifth season of play this fall.

Then-grad student Jason Henderson of MSU lab engineered the soil for the modules, testing for porosity, strength, and durability to match East Lansing's climate. Drainage is to the asphalt base underneath the modules and then surface drainage to channels under the sidelines. The soil heating system using forced air initially installed in 2002 was turned off and now turf/growth covers are used in spring and fall.

SportsTurf recently heard from Amy Fouty, CSFM, who was busy preparing for the football season.

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Spartan basketball coach Tom Izzo is surrounded by Amy Fouty and (clockwise) Tim Vanini, Tim VanLoo, and Alec Kowalewski.

ST: What are your specific responsibilities in this job?

Fouty: My responsibilities begin with the football facilities: the indoor practice building (infill field), the outdoor practice complex (two native soil natural grass fields and one 50 x 25-yard infill "study area" for various drill and workout activities), and the stadium field level. I report directly to Greg Ianni, our Senior Associate Athletic Director in charge of facilities, and John L. Smith, our head coach.

My secondary responsibilities include speaking on campus to students, speaking locally and nationally to represent our athletic department and turf program at various alumni events and turf conferences, and to renovate and manage new construction of athletic fields for the department. At different times, I may act as architect and designer, project manager, construction manager, and complete the grow-in before turning it back over to our athletic grounds supervisor, William Ratliff, and staff. In my 3 years with Michigan State University, major renovations to the football complex, softball facility, and baseball facility have all been completed.

ST: How did you first become interested in turf management and athletic field management?

Fouty: I helped my grandparents work in their yard from the time I could pick up sticks. I have always loved being outside and helping take care of the outside of their home.

I have also always been very passionate about sports and competition, and took an interest in athletic fields following a major injury while playing softball. In my junior year of high school, I slid into third base on a steal and caught my cleats under the bag, which was not secured properly. I tore my Achilles tendon and sprained my knee. I had always wanted to coach or play sports at a higher level, which I did not think would be possible anymore following rehabilitation, so I looked to other avenues where I could still combine my love of outdoors and athletics.

When I was 17, I began working on a golf course around the clubhouse grounds, where we planted and maintained about 10,000 annuals, as well as the rest of the beds on the course. Over the next 3 years, I progressed and became a second assistant golf course superintendent, before coming to Michigan State for turfgrass management. The two courses were constantly renovating tees, bunkers, fairways, and greens, and working on these improvements gave me a background in construction.

Following graduation, I became an assistant golf course superintendent at a course here in Michigan and became the superintendent the following year for two years.

ST: What was your first sports turf job?

Fouty: My first sport turf job was taking care of daily field operations for the football and soccer fields at the University of Michigan. I look back now and joke about how I thought the transition from golf to sports turf would be easy. I learned very quickly (and publicly) how different they are. The contacts I made through the STMA with other turf managers around the country helped me to understand athletic field management at the collegiate and professional level and over my 5 seasons at the University of Michigan I was very fortunate to have

FIELD OF THE YEAR



great mentors on the football staff. They took time to teach me about the game, the importance of each position, and how to recognize what was excellent playability, and what was the most beneficial for each position in terms of field conditions. I took that football knowledge and combined it with my turf experience to develop my own management philosophies on and off the field.

ST: How is the innovative turf system put in a few years ago performing? Are there maintenance practices you do that are unique to this field?

Fouty: The Spartan stadium field is not unlike most stadium fields, other than it is modular. We have not needed to trade out any modules and have found the engineered rootzone to be fantastic. Like all fields there is a learning curve in the first few years and we have developed a good understanding of this field.

I do a great deal of aerating in the spring, disrupting 35% of the surface area and topdress throughout the year as needed. Also, I syringe throughout the summer as necessary, using PGRs throughout the year and apply a 2:1 ratio of potassium to nitrogen. My turf program is not unlike managing a putting green in the woods.

My management philosophies are based along managing for a strong and healthy root system, as having such allows for a dense and healthy turf stand. Also, moderate nitrogen applications, elevated potassium levels, and irrigation in moderation. Everything done is for the root structure, not the top growth.

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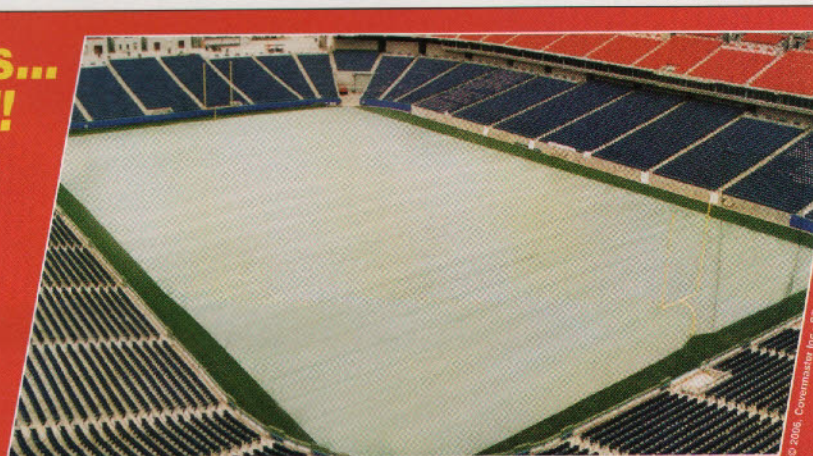
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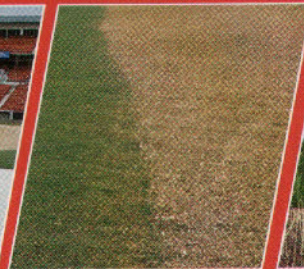
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I do not aerate in the fall or early spring until the team has completed spring ball, as I want the surface to be as solid as possible. With 90 percent sand, 10 percent silt clay root zone, the field dries down and plays very firm and fast, which gives me some added security in those years when it is 90 degrees all summer long and the plant does not come out of the summer in optimum health.

ST: What “off the field” (or “soft”) skills do you find most important in your job?

Fouty: Communication is of first and foremost importance of the “soft” skills. How to Win Friends and Influence People, by Dale Carnegie, helped me learn many techniques in effective communication. I believe in being direct, clear, patient, honest, and understanding. I try my best to empathize and under-

stand other’s perspectives and work together to find the most productive common ground when at an impasse.

When it comes to my employees, I try to inspire those who work with me to be self-motivated, taking pride and ownership in our fields. If you are not excited to get up and come in each morning this is not the job for you. I have found that you can’t teach self-motivation, but only try to draw that out and nurture that passion.

I am also fortunate to work in an environment that promotes a team approach in our daily working environment. Our athletic programs are based around a blue-collar working mentality. To be successful, we have to all work together for the common goal of winning. I take the same approach with my management style and personal daily work ethic.

ST: How do you balance your family life with work demands?

Fouty: My husband and I met at Michigan State and have been married for 8 years. Being a golf course superintendent and sport turf manager is not just a job, it’s a lifestyle. We both are very fortunate to work for people who value family and time together with family. We take a lot of time off together in the winter and head to our cabin in northern Michigan where we recharge the old batteries by riding snowmobiles and entertaining family and friends.

We do our best during the growing season to schedule around major events, making time for each other and our kids as often as we can to keep that balance. My husband and I both understand the demands placed upon each other, and it comes down to accepting

that, during the eight months a year of our seasons, "his" golf course and "my" athletic fields are our children. We have found it difficult, yet possible, to give 100% to all areas of our life.

ST: How do you see your job changing in the next 10 years?

Fouty: I feel my position is already rather progressive. Along with my daily responsibilities, I participate in marketing, fundraising, academics, alumni functions, future facility planning, and event management. The more versatile I can be, and the more I interact with the other areas within the athletic department, the more I can participate and interject my experience into the business of athletics.

ST: How has being female in a predominantly male profession affected your career? Do you have any advice other women who might follow your footsteps?

Fouty: This is one of those questions I don't like to address because I do not look at myself as a female in a male profession. I think of myself as a professional in my chosen field. When I started out in the golf industry, my superintendent gave me some "real world" advice—if I wanted to be successful in the turf profession I would have to work harder, smarter, and overall be better due to being a predominantly male profession. I accepted that as fact and considered it a challenge, rather than it being an obstacle to overcome. I also asked for his support to do this. Since that time, every person I have ever worked for has nurtured and supported my drive to learn new things and continually strive for professional perfection.

If I could offer advice to other women it would be to find those individuals who will mentor and guide you like you are "one of the guys"—where being, learning, and working in an environment where there are no special favors or accommodations for being a woman. Put yourself in constructive situations to grow and look at the people you work with as professionals, not men and women. Keep a positive attitude, work hard each day, keep your eyes on your goals, and no matter what, you will be a success. Use the resources and contacts from STMA and always remember to act like the professional you wanted to be treated as. ■

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