

A Day in the Life of a Sports Turf Manager

By Dale Getz, CSFM



Dale Getz, CSFM, checks the soil at Notre Dame Stadium.

What a great profession. As a sports turf manager you have it made. You get to hobnob with great players, provide playing conditions that help mold the next great players, and attend every sporting event. Your stress level is low because you love your work.

Not quite true? Well, this is the perception that others may have of you. Whether or not any job is, in fact, this idyllic, one thing remains true of sports turf management: it is an exciting, challenging, and often rewarding profession, even if most people do not realize what it is you actually do.

As the former Athletic Facilities Manager at the University of Notre Dame, my days (and sometimes nights) were filled with a multiplicity of duties. This is not unlike what many of you may find in your pro-

fessions whether at the municipal, K-12 school, or college/university level. It seems most turf management jobs have evolved into facilities management. Allow me to describe a typical day in the spring, when baseball, softball, men's and women's tennis, and men's and women's lacrosse were in full swing.

Remember, the grass is growing faster now than at any other time of the year, summer help is not yet available because school is still in session, football and soccer are in the middle of their off-season training schedules—and the weather forecast is calling for rain four of the next seven days.

5:30-6:45 a.m. I arrive at least a 1/2 hour before my staff in order to write the assignments on the Job Board, answer email and voice mail messages, and review the day's schedule. Each assignment is conveyed

I WILL HAVE TO SUBMIT A WRITTEN PROPOSAL, EXPLAINING WHERE WE WILL SET UP THE TABLES AND CHAIRS FOR THE PLAYERS, HOW WE WILL SIGN-POST THE EVENT, AND HOW WE WILL ORGANIZE QUEUING STATIONS SO THAT THE CONCOURSE WILL NOT BE BLOCKED.

verbally to a staff member in case any questions arise. They will be out the door by 6:10 to work on their designated areas.

6:00 a.m. Twenty of the 35 intramural sports turf acres still need to be mowed this week and the fields need to be lined daily. I do not like to mow when it is raining, but I cannot afford to get behind on my mowing this time of year. The additional labor needed for picking up the clippings is simply not available. I decide to send two wide-area rotary mowers out and instruct the staff to monitor their radios in case they are needed to help remove the tarps for baseball. They begin mowing the "better draining" fields first.

6:05 a.m. The four-person field preparation crew has been lining fields every day for the past 2 weeks, often rescheduling their work due to rain. They have had very little time to clean and maintain their equipment and they have already used up the bulk tank of mixed paint. They will need to complete a pre-game lining for baseball today and also complete a final lining if the weather cooperates. In addition, four

soccer fields and the men's (white) and women's (blue) lacrosse fields still need to be lined before the Friday night and Saturday day games.

I instruct the crew to thoroughly clean the equipment and check the shut-off valves for dried paint. Then, mix and fill the bulk tank (using 1/2 oz per gallon of Primo in the paint to slow the growth rate of the turf on the intramural and practice fields). Be ready to paint by 9 a.m. in case the weather breaks.

6:10 a.m. Because of last night's thunderstorm, the tennis courts are flooded. This is generally not a problem since the tennis teams start practicing at 3:30, giving the courts enough drying time. The courts, however, are covered with night crawlers and if they are not removed in the morning, they will dry and the 11:30 phys ed classes will smash them into the surface. This staining is difficult to remove and we need to keep the courts in pristine condition. Our nationally ranked women's tennis team may be hosting the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

I decide to send a four-person crew to the tennis courts with water brooms and squeegees to remove the worms and prepare the courts.

6:15-8:00 a.m. My first priority of the day is actually baseball. The team ended up covering the infield late last night because of the thunderstorm. It is still drizzling this morning. Rain is forecast until 9:00, the game is scheduled for 3:00, and the field must be ready by noon for batting and infield practice. We absolutely need two hours to get the field game ready, and we still have to drag the skin, repair the mound and home plate areas, mow the infield and outfield, clean the dugout and stands, and empty the trash receptacles. The baseball coach, who has already called this morning, is concerned about the field condition for today's pivotal game. We agree to meet at 7:30 to survey the field and see how much water is actually on the tarp.

It is still drizzling when I arrive at the stadium to find the coach is already there, talking with my staff. We spend half an hour discussing possible solutions and options. At 8:15 the rain suddenly stops and the sky begins to brighten.

I tell the coach that I will check the weather data and call him. In the meantime, two staff members will begin pumping the excess water off the tarps. They will then start cleaning the dugouts, etc., and possibly begin dragging the warning track and mowing the outfield if weather permits. They are also instructed to notify me by radio if the weather changes so that we can make arrangements for the tarp removal. Otherwise, we will pull the tarp at 9:15.

8:15 a.m. This leaves the mechanic and the spray technician. The mechanic, who works a later shift so that he can prepare and repair the equipment used during the regular shift, informs me that the lever arm on the Triplex game field mower is broken. The part has been ordered, but will not arrive until Friday.

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The spray technician has been busy applying pre-emergent control to selected areas, spot fertilizing, and overseeding the fields that were not completed in the fall. This has left very little time for equipment maintenance and recordkeeping.

I decide the mechanic will have to re-set the height on our backup Triplex and make sure it is ready to go by 9:00. The spray technician will clean the spreader and update the pesticide application records. They should both be prepared to work at the baseball stadium as well.

9:00 a.m. The radar and weather forecast look good. I call the coach and tell him that the game is on. He will call the opposing team and umpires, and I will notify the crew to pull the tarp at 9:15. In the meantime, I reassign the spray technician to mow the outfield and pull two of the tennis complex crew to assist in field preparation. The lining crew will begin chalking and lining the field at 10:45. I will stay and assist the baseball crew for the remainder of the morning and my assistant will supervise the other crews. The baseball setup goes smoothly, and I am called by radio to the tennis courts.

11:30 a.m. The tennis courts were resurfaced last fall and only non-scuffing tennis shoes can be worn on the courts. The phys ed tennis instructors, however, failed to enforce this rule and the students have scuffed the courts. I meet with the instructor to discuss the situation, but a solution cannot be reached. I make a mental note to send a memo on

the tennis complex rules to the Physical Education Department Chair.

12:30 p.m. On my way to an afternoon meeting, I stop by the baseball stadium to check on the crew and discuss how preparation has progressed. Before leaving, I grab a 'dog' from the concession stand for lunch.

1:00 p.m. I attend a meeting about the annual Blue & Gold Spring Football scrimmage. Due to construction in the stadium, the upper concourse must be barricaded in order to restrict access. The other main topic is determining how the post-scrimmage autograph session will be conducted. In past years, we allowed the crowd to walk onto the field; this year we decide to move the autograph session to the concourse. Although this decision will protect the grass from the 10,000+ visitors, it requires special approval from Risk Management and Safety. I will have to submit a written proposal, explaining where we will set up the tables and chairs for the players, how we will sign-post the event, and how we will organize queuing stations so that the concourse will not be blocked.

2:30 p.m. On the way back to my office, I meet with my assistant to review the day's activities. The baseball setup went well and we were even able to finish the mowing. But we experienced a flat tire on the 455-D and lost 1 1/2 hours before it was fixed, so we are still behind on our overall mowing.

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I decide that if we cannot complete the mowing during the day tomorrow, we will have to bring in a crewmember over the weekend. My assistant will check to see how the lining crew is doing and will then reassign the tennis complex crew to trim mowers and string trimmers.

3:30 p.m. Not quite the end of the day. My staff has left except for the two who are working at the baseball stadium. I begin working on the Blue & Gold Scrimmage Proposal for Risk Management when I hear a commotion in the hallway. My office is located inside the football stadium near the locker rooms, and it turns out that an assistant coach has broken his key off in the lock, preventing the players from getting into the locker room.

Having a master key to the stadium, I lead the players through the service entrance, and then call the locksmith to get the key out.

5:30 p.m. With the proposal finished and the memo to the phys ed chair sufficiently underway, it is time to head home. While recapping the day's events, I am satisfied. Despite the rainy start, the baseball game went off without a hitch, and we even caught up on some mowing and lining. We will see what tomorrow brings, but one thing is clear: this is a great profession!

Dale Getz, CSFM, managed the general grounds as well as the golf course before spending 10 years managing the sports turf at Notre Dame. Getz was one of the first five members of STMA to earn the Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) distinction. He now is the national Sports Fields and Grounds Sales Manager for The Toro Company. ■



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