

Lessons learned in 25 years with STMA, Part V

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Lesson #14: **Develop a safety checklist.** Develop a one- or two-page safety-checklist that is reviewed each year and approved by your boss. Include field areas such as bases, mound, irrigation heads, etc.

Also list non-field areas such as bleachers, fences, dugouts, warning signs, etc. List the priority of each item and indicate those that are dangerous and need immediate attention. Make a column on the checklist for "proposed work completed." Sign and date each item that has been completed and approved. A checklist will document your awareness of problems and that you are taking measures to improve safety of the facility. At first, funding may be directed toward non-field related items, but eventually resources will be required for field maintenance as indicated by the safety checklist.

Lesson #15: Be an effective communicator.

Managing a sports facility requires coordination among the administrator, coach, band director, and grounds manager. Administrators should keep in mind that proper traffic control costs nothing in terms of dollars and at the same time offers the most effective means of reducing dangerously worn areas on game and practice fields. Understanding your role as a user of the field is a first step in communication.

Coaches must take an active interest in scheduling practice activities and preventing excessive turf wear. The coach and the turf manager can work together to develop improved grass areas specifically for drills that are conducted off the game and practice fields. Really great head coaches usually have really great fields because they treat their sports turf manager as an assistant coach and

view him or her as a valued player on the team.

Dan Devine, the great athletic director from Notre Dame, once expressed to me "my job is to instill pride . . . after that human spirit and determination take us the rest

of the way." He certainly understood pride as an emotion but he also knew how to use it as a commodity. The best ADs and coaches understand pride and how to use it to build their team and facility.

Band directors should have a practice field painted on another grass area or in a parking lot. Areas should be situated so that practice can be viewed from above, as if you were in the bleachers. Band practice on the game field should be limited to once per week and only when the soil is dry enough to resist compaction in marching paths. No activity (band, football, or field maintenance) should be conducted on the field while there is frost on the grass.

Grounds managers should realize that they are caring for a multi-use facility rather than just a football field. Every effort should be made to accommodate all groups that have activities on the field. Each group should take responsibility for the condition of the field. Each group can be viewed as a potential resource for funding field maintenance expenses. Extra use requires additional labor, equipment, and resources. Contributions should be requested from the band and athletic booster club. If given the chance the band or athletic booster club may be responsible for assisting with the purchase of a new core aerifier.

Administrators should clearly define conditions for using and not using the field. As much as possible, reserve the field for games only. In addition to field damage, administrators should consider field condition, player safety, and potential liability.

Lesson #16: Maintaining a cushion of thatch/mat between the players and the distinct layer of soil below is necessary to develop safe playing conditions on intensely trafficked fields. Fields without an effective layer of thatch/mat are easily compacted and quickly turn to mud because there is no separation between the players and the soil. It sounds simple, but many sports turf managers never inspect their thatch/mat layer and have no strategy to improve this valuable layer of cushion in high-traffic areas of the field. For a more complete understanding of the "Grass Systems Response to Traffic and Recovery" go to <http://turfgrass.hort.iastate.edu/extension/EGtrafficscenario.pdf>. ■

