Holidays throw work/family balance in sharp relief

Many dedicated sports turf managers spend a lot of time at work. This can be especially noticeable during the holiday season. We asked three Certified Sports Field Managers how they maintain a healthy work/family balance:

Kevin Malone, 52, is manager of the Baker Field Athletic Complex at Columbia University in New York City. Kevin spends nearly 4 hours a day commuting from Long Island via train. Malone says his family issues aren't about spending time with his children because they are college-age; rather, he does what he has to do because part of his compensation package is free tuition for his daughter to attend Ivy League Columbia, which is worth about $40,000 a year. As well, the university picks up 50% of his son's tuition at St. John's University, which is worth another $10K a year.

His football season is as crazy as anyone's; he sometimes spends about 75 hours a week on the job during the season even though he's a salaried employee. "It's not expected; I choose to do it," he says. "It's the right thing to do, and it's worth it. I love what I do even during the long, tiring days."

Kari Allen, a veteran of minor league baseball, spent the past year as an hourly worker for the first time and it's made a difference in her lifestyle. "I am not the person making all of the management decisions for the fields so I no longer bring any work or work-related stress home with me, and I only work a typical 40 hour week. The family/work balance is not a major issue for me at this time," she says.

"This balance had been a challenge for me previously, however. I am extremely fortunate to have a husband who has worked in minor league baseball and understands its demands."

Jeff Salmond is athletic turf manager for the University of Oklahoma. "I believe that you need to have a wife and family that are very understanding of your profession. You need to be able to communicate, stay on the same page, and be able to have some give and take."

"My wife, Loida, is also in college athletics and we have a young daughter. We really have to work together and coordinate our demanding schedules. Between our schedules there are a few missed birthday parties, holidays and special occasions," Salmond says. "Therefore we try and make up for lost time during periods of inactivity, which sometimes may be minimal. Then when we have times with family at home or the holidays, you try your best to give them 100% of your undivided attention."

"I also believe that you have to surround yourself with trusted and loyal staff... that you take care of because they are your lifeline."