

Being “green” an opportunity for sports turf managers



Top: Trotta speaks with UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner at UN headquarters.
Bottom: GSA-NY sponsors a Great American Cleanup event.

WHAT AN INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY we have! As the world struggles through a rocky economic landscape we simultaneously wrestle with the environmental issues that challenge the status quo of the industrial age. Here in the 21st century we've come face to face with the realities of our misguided trajectory:

- the reckless disregard for the ecosystems that define Earth
- a mistaken belief in the biosphere's ability to absorb and dilute unlimited wastes
- an entire civilization unsustainably powered by dirty fossil fuels.

A new era brings the promise of a new paradigm. The quest for cleaner, “greener” ways has become a mainstream topic. People around the world agree that our children deserve nothing less than the clean air and water of a healthy planet, teeming with the robust diversity of life. Human ingenuity can pave the way to that future and stimulate a new innovation-driven economy based on sustainability and balanced with the planet's natural processes. Rip Van Winkle may not realize it, but the science and political wills are emerging and the work is underway. It's an auspicious time for sports turf managers to secure our position in this bright green future.

Natural grass is the ideal recreational surface and, when appropriately managed, affords many environmental benefits like cooling and oxygenating the air and filtering water. We turf managers need to recognize our own roles within the environmental movement. Those of us who maintain the green space necessary for humankind's well-being belong on the front lines of this movement, alongside wind turbine installers, conser-

vation officers, recycling staff, solar panel technicians and others working today to shape tomorrow.

As spectators we'd be pushed aside. As participants we're in the game as green leaders for a greener future. We need to collectively embrace this identity and project this image to a society that benefits from our diligence but is too often unaware of our indispensable contributions.

The Ecoflag

I am very pleased to be associated with an organization that is leading the effort to link sports and environmental stewardship. The Global Sports Alliance (GSA) is an official partner of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Our mission is to promote environmental awareness and action in the world of sports. The GSA was established in Japan in 1999 by Dr. Tatsuo Okada and has since spread around the world. Our symbol, the ecoflag, is currently flying in 54 countries, which includes the participation of GSA-USA. Under the leadership of President Jane Poynter, GSA-USA is growing, with teams now in several US locations.

Since its inception the GSA has been primarily an effort driven by athletes, teams, coaches and sporting goods manufacturers. The significance of their involvement is obvious. I'm honored to serve as the team captain of GSA-New York and to bring the perspective of a facilities manager to the organization. As sports venue managers and decision-makers we wield tremendous influence to effect environmental change. The GSA would warmly welcome other athletic field professionals to join in our international initiative.

GSA-USA is excited to announce two collaborative projects. The first was launched in the autumn of 2008 in partnership with the Sports Turf Managers of New York (STMONY). GSA-New York is working with STMONY to manage a new feature on the STMONY website called “The GREEN Corner,” which reports on GSA activities and focuses on up-to-date ‘sports and the environment’ information, a valuable resource for progressive sports enthusiasts.

The second collaboration involves the Sports Turf Managers Association. At the STMA board meeting in March, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed by the presidents of the two organizations that opens the door to opportunities to work together for the benefit of our industry and our environment. Initially, a new link on the STMA website leads to GSA’s “Global Forum for Sports and the Environment” (G-ForSE), the world’s largest database on the topic. It can be found on the Environmental Stewardship page under the Resources Technical Info tab. This webpage also provides the “Green” Sports Event Guidelines, jointly issued by the STMA and GSA-USA. This document is a useful checklist for anyone wishing to soften the environmental impact of a sports event.

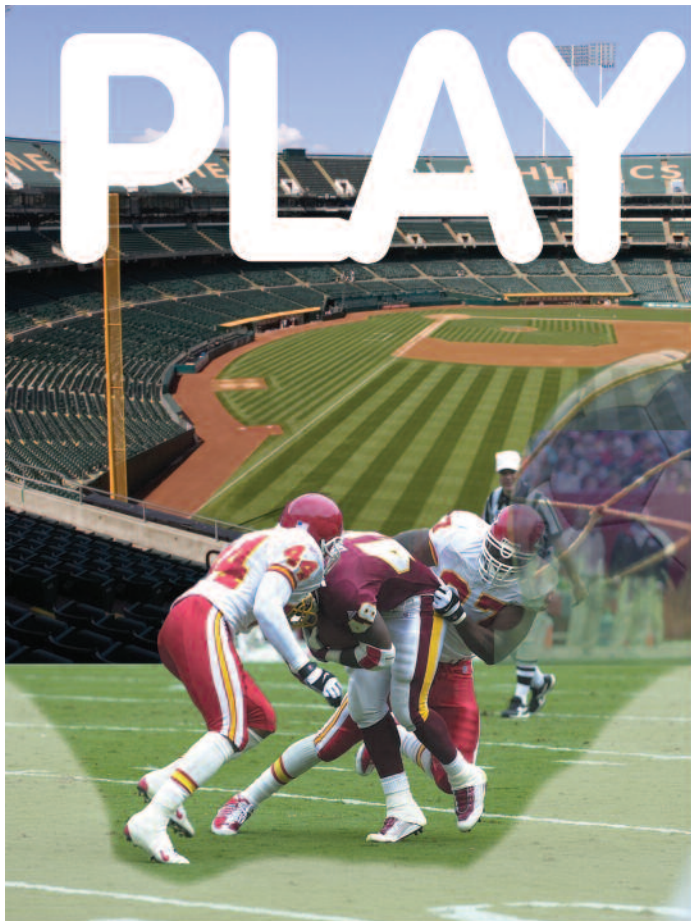
We’re hopeful that these resources will provide ideas and inspiration to guide sports facilities managers in amending programs as

needed to lessen our impact and to achieve our individual and institutional environmental goals. Even small changes, implemented industry-wide, would change the face of sports and recreation. Environmental stewardship is a team sport and must surely be a guiding principle in the management of society’s recreational space.

We can look forward to forging new partnerships with those who share our commitment to ‘consider the environment’ in the world of sports. We can address environmental problems by being part of the solution and by doing so, clarify and elevate our professional image. We can work proactively and transparently in these challenging economic times to ensure that our contributions to society are recognized as a necessity, not a luxury—providing skilled management of vital sports and recreation facilities and serving as dedicated, expert stewards of the Earth. Our work is representative of tomorrow’s eco-realism, where humankind’s quality of life is a palpable factor in the sustainability equation.

The world is changing. What an incredible opportunity we have! ■

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