

FIELD OF THE YEAR



Michael Buras,
CSFM



Historic Longwood Cricket Club wins new STMA Award

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2008, the STMA Field of the Year Awards included a “sporting grounds” category to expand the pool of potential winners to include those sports outside the “Big Four,” football, baseball, softball and soccer.

Longwood Cricket Club is a tennis club that had its first tournament in 1882 and was the site of the first Davis Cup competition. Longwood last hosted its cricket in 1933. Located in Chestnut Hill near Fenway Park outside Boston, the club

opened in 1877 and in 1881 Longwood member Richard Sears became the first United States singles champion.

Today Michael Buras, CSFM is Head Groundskeeper in charge of this historic real estate. He has his BS in plant and soil science with a concentration in turf management and has been at Longwood 12 years. Buras is also vice president of New England’s STMA Chapter and the sports turf representative on the New England Regional Turfgrass Foundation’s board of directors.

Left to Right: Brandy Mirth, Michael Buras, Ben Polimer, Andrew Walsh, Tim Burns, Charlie Bartlett, Victor Maillet



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The staff at Longwood includes Ben Polimer, Tim Burns, Charlie Bartlett, Neil Johnson, and Andrew Walsh. They tend to the *poa annua* on native, sandy loam soil over a 7-month season.

Buras says, "With only a handful of comparable tennis clubs in the US, I have no peers within driving distance where I can go and share information. I did go see Eddie Seaward at Wimbledon though, the undisputed leader in grass courts.

"The sports turf and golf industries provide the basis for our management, but neither has the same demands as our turf. We need knowledge from both regimens to fit our specialized requirements; our soil needs to be compacted and firm as a putting green and grass cut as a fairway, all while being expected to survive wear comparable to a sports field," says Buras.

"In 130 years Longwood has had only five head groundskeepers, a sign of the job's esoteric requirements," he says. "Each manager has passed on his experience, his vision of the ideal court, what he did to achieve them. And each new groundskeeper has modified these methods to fulfill the ever-increasing expectations of players and spectators."

ST: What are the unique challenges in caring for tennis courts?

Buras: Longwood currently has about 1000 tennis loving members playing on 25 grass and 19 clay tennis courts. The management of grass tennis courts has many of the same challenges other sports turf managers deal with. What is unique is that lawn

tennis is played on a compacted soil with grass cut at 5/16 of an inch. The court must be 100 percent dry for safe play and much of the wear is in concentrated areas.

ST: Do you play tennis?

Buras: Most of the grounds crew plays tennis. In August we split into two teams with some of the teaching staff and play the "Grounds Crew Classic" tennis tournament. Playing tennis is lot of fun and it adds to our awareness on how the courts are playing.

ST: What are your responsibilities at the club?

Buras: My responsibilities include working with a staff of ten that manage the tennis courts, lawns, gardens and various construction projects. Communication with tennis staff, club management and members regarding condition of the courts, tournaments and special events is particularly important at a club with so

many courts and players. As only the fifth head groundskeeper at Longwood in 131 years an important responsibility is upholding the high standards of my four predecessors and passing along their methods and techniques to the next generation of sports turf managers.

ST: What's the best piece of turf management advice you've ever received?

Buras: I can't say one piece of advice has been the best. I have received so much valuable advice from educators, peers, friends and family I can't list them all, but probably the most important lesson I have learned is from watching my father. Hire good people and treat them well.

ST: How do you keep your "engine" charged to do your best every day?

Buras: There are a number of ways I keep my "engine" charged to do my best every day. I am fortunate to work in a profession that I love (I read turf text books for fun.) At work I am surrounded by coworkers who are devoted to Longwood and professional sports turf management. Being involved with professional associations keeps me in contact with passionate sports turf managers that work on all different types of fields. The members of Longwood are committed to having a great facility. They trust and support the grounds department so that we are able to look for and investigate new ways to improve the tennis courts and this keeps the job fresh and exciting. They always support professional devel-

opment opportunities, like when they sent me to England last summer to visit Wimbledon!

ST: How do you balance work and professional life?

Buras: My wife, Mary Ann, is the important link in balancing work and personal life. She understands the in-season demands of the job and is always there to help at home and at work. She has hammered in her share of nails on the clay court lines and accompanied me on many nights when irrigation needed to be shut off after a thunderstorm.

ST: What are your favorite things to do off the job?

Buras: Off the job I enjoy coaching youth sports and following the Boston sports teams. When I can find time in the summer, a round of golf on Cape Cod and then going to the beach with my 7 and 9 year old daughters is an ideal day. ■

