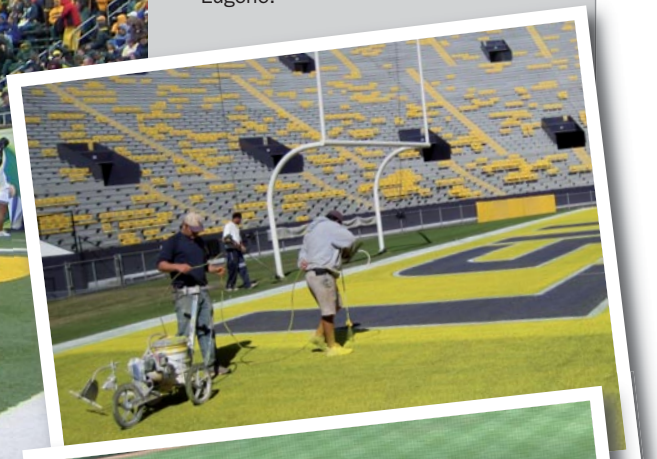
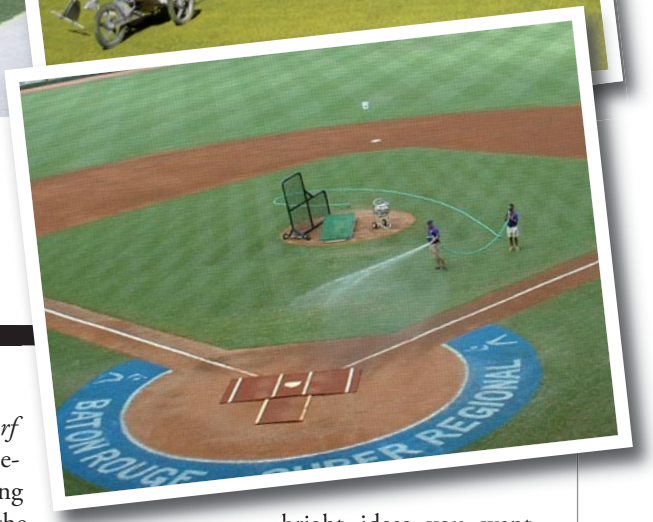
By Eric Fasbender, CSFM

» **Left: ERIC FASBENDER,** CSFM at the University of Oregon

» **Below: PAINTING THE ENDZONE** at Tiger Field in Baton Rouge.

» **Bottom image: FASBENDER** met with the baseball and softball coaches at LSU the same day he flew out of Eugene.





Jumping right in
best way to start new job

IN DECEMBER 2008 I was presented with the opportunity to leave the University of Oregon and take a new position and new challenges with Louisiana State University Athletics. My last day on the job at Oregon was Friday, January 31 and the next day my wife and I were on a plane with our 2-month-old daughter, headed to Baton Rouge where I had a meeting with the Baseball and Softball coaches scheduled for later that afternoon.

I have been looking back and wondering how I managed to get myself in this position in the first place. How does a guy from the suburbs of Chicago end up working in the Pacific Northwest and the Deep South for programs like Oregon and LSU? I consider myself pretty lucky to be in this position. *SportsTurf* asked me to share some of my experiences about moving and working in two such distinct regions of the country for two high-profile programs.

Turf management

There are obviously differences in managing warm season and cool season turf, but the anxiety I had going into the position at LSU never seemed to materialize in the way I thought it might. I had experience and education with bermudagrass from my time at the University of Tennessee but that was as a student, not the one responsible at the end of the day when the chips fall.

As I have heard several people in this industry say, "You can make all the bright ideas you want, but when your butt is on the line, you think twice." I have been fortunate because I am blessed with knowledgeable, hard working people around me and they have been the foundation for our success thus far.

My lack of anxiety was also compounded by the fact that I literally got off the plane and went right to work and my new assistant, staff and I had no time to worry, as we were soon thrust into the baseball and softball seasons. By the time both sports came to an end, we had experienced the successful opening of two brand new facilities, a successful spring

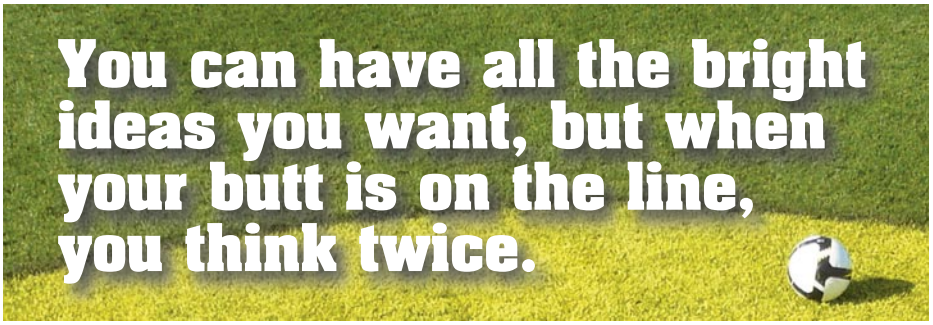
ryegrass transition, and several IPM applications for weeds and insects and it was all highlighted by a baseball National Championship. What more could you want? Well, it turned out we got a lot more than we bargained for.

Transitioning the playing surface at Tiger Stadium after the Spring Game in late April became our new focus and proved to be a bit nerve racking. The stadium surface had been sprigged in June before the 2008 football season and saw five games in a row to finish off the season. What that meant for us was once the ryegrass was gone; we were left with pretty much bare sand.

Our initial survey of the field saw a small stem of green bermudagrass every 18 to 24 inches but our stolons and rhizomes were healthy. We consulted with several people, including Dr. Jeff Beasley, Ron Strahan and Steven Borst in the LSU College of Agriculture, Jeremy Menna with the University of Maryland and Jesse Pritchard, CSFM with the University of Virginia as well as LSU Assistant Athletics Director for Facilities and Grounds, Todd Jeansonne. The plan was to fertilize weekly and irrigate daily. Once there was enough grass to mow, we started to mow every other day at ½-inch and when the profile was stable enough, we aerated or verticut every other week.

The process was slow going at first but the summer heat helped immensely. Our Bulls-eye" bermuda loves hot weather and once the middle of May rolled around and the temperatures were regularly in the 90's we began to see stolons running everywhere. The field went from an estimated 5% coverage at the end of April to an estimated 75% at the end of May. Before we knew it, Tiger Stadium was fully covered and we found ourselves preparing for fall football practice and soccer practice. Aside from several irrigation malfunctions, the summer seemed to fly by and we were soon painting Tiger Stadium for the home opener against Vanderbilt.

This past fall's season went by even quicker than the previous months. There was a lot of rain, in fact it seemed to rain every week that we had a home game. September's rainfall was 10 inches above average, October was 13 inches above; finally in November it began to level off. With that type of weather, we seemed to have to paint the field twice before every game. Once on Wednesday to make sure we had some markings down in case it rained right up to game time, and again if the weather broke on Thursday, Friday, Friday night, or even Saturday morning a few times. Thank goodness we play night games at LSU! With all that said, we were able to get through with flying colors. In fact, Coach Miles said that this season was the best that Tiger Stadium and the Practice Fields performed since he arrived in 2005.



Weather

Weather has always been a favorite topic of mine. It can serve as a conversation icebreaker, an information tool or as a source of debate and anxiety. And believe me, there has been no shortage of weather in the sources of work for this article. There is an old saying in Eugene, "It only rains once a year, it's just November to May" that sums up my time in the Pacific Northwest. This constant rain forced us to work with the weather and not necessarily against it. Checking the 10-day outlook and radar became a daily vigil at the computer. We needed to check to see if what we had planned for the day could be accommodated by the weather event occurring outside. The rain was never very hard, more between a mist and a drizzle, but it made mowing, topdressing, spray applications and infield skin maintenance difficult. Our staff was more like firemen than groundskeepers, dressed in rain gear and ready to spring into action as soon as the weather conditions became optimal to achieve what we had planned. One way or another, the work was done, and we were able to be pretty successful with our practices. [Editor's note: Oregon won two STMA Field of the Year Awards under Fasbender.]

The weather in Baton Rouge on the other hand is observed regularly for an entirely different reason, worker safety. This was a big adjustment I had to make coming from Eugene where the weather was fairly mild compared to Baton Rouge where you have weather extremes. Temperatures can reach 90 degrees in mid-April, summertime temperatures are registered in the high 90s with 80-90% humidity and thunderstorms can appear out of nowhere. In the fall, when we start the day, it might be 45 degrees outside at 7 am and by 11 am it is 75 degrees. Keeping our staff cool, hydrated and healthy is in the forefront of our mind all the time. I have also found myself looking at the radar in the summer and fall, not over the state of Louisiana, but over the Atlantic Ocean and worrying about the temperature of the water in the Gulf of Mexico. Hurricanes were something that I had in the back of my mind when we moved here, but when hurricane season arrived June 1, it garnered a bit more attention. Fortunately, there were no close calls and only one hurricane entered the Gulf this year.

Staff

Both staffs I worked with have characters and misfits, but who among us doesn't have that? What success in this industry really boils down to is can you manage your people effectively to get the most out of their abilities and educate them so they

gain new skills and knowledge. I have been blessed in my career to have great people to work with and my experience at LSU has been no different. When my assistant, Mike Watson, and I began to evaluate the grounds staff we quickly found out who worked well together, who enjoyed what they were doing, what type of special skills they possessed and what type of additional skills they needed for us to accomplish our goals to be successful. We were fortunate to have a group of individuals that worked well together as a team and had a wide variety of trade skills. To that, we added two former interns from the University of Oregon. Their arrival along with the skills of our existing crew marked a turning point this spring. We were very successful with our fields and achieved our number one goal, which was to earn the trust of our coaches, players and administrators. We hope that the initial success of 2009 will lead to greater triumphs in 2010!

I have been very fortunate to have worked in some pretty incredible places and have had the privilege to work with some very talented people. The thing that I have learned by working in these two organizations is that what you need to have successful in this industry is the drive and determination to do your best and have a willingness to learn new skills and apply them. Some of the obstacles in our way might be weather, increased traffic or staff knowledge but, ultimately, what we as Sports Turf Managers are trying to accomplish, is the best playing surface for our athletes. ■

>> **THERE ARE CHARACTERS** in every crew; could anything be more true?

Eric Fasbender, CSFM is sports turf manager for Louisiana State University Athletics.

 By Debra Kneeshaw

Replacing a synthetic turf field
— one manager's experience

EAST DELTA SPORTS COMPLEX in Portland, OR is the home of one of FieldTurf's first outdoor installations of a synthetic infill system in the world. The field was installed in October 1997 and after 11 years of use was removed and recycled in August of 2008. It was replaced with a new generation, synthetic infill system sport field, in early November 2008.

The original installation was a first generation 2 inch, 28 ounce slit film, or honeycomb fiber, with an infill of cryogenic rubber and sieved local sand. This slit film fiber was designed to break apart through maintenance to mimic the finer texture of a natural grass blade. The fiber continued to breakdown past the intended fine texture, however, and the field's surface hardness was attributed in part to the fines and angular properties to the sieved local sand.

This field received extensive use with 650 permitted games a year, primarily soccer and both men's and women's lacrosse. The field is an unlocked facility and is open to the public year round. Multiple practices, clinics, and play occur without permits.

The first several years after installation a variety of maintenance tools were used to keep the surface hardness minimized and to address the playability of the field. A Clegg Hammer was used to measure surface hardness and was converted to a Gmax rating. After the fifth year, the fiber was breaking apart so fine that it would actually break off, and the surface hardness, Gmax results, were at a level of concern. After 8 years the field no longer performed as originally intended. After 11 years the field was worn to a level of minimal pile height of fiber above the infill. This resulted in a field surface that allowed very fast ball travel and slippery footing. It was time to replace the field.

Replacement funding is a key consideration that all synthetic sports field owners should be aware of. Ideally it should be established at the onset of a new installation so that funds are in place at the projected longevity of the field. Portland Parks and Recreation was able to develop a replacement trust fund that accumulated revenue generated by permit fees and light usage fees. Additional funding sources included a State Parks land and water conservation grant, user group contributions matched by levy dollars, and concession/gate fees.

Replacement funding is a key consideration of which all synthetic sports field owners should be aware.

Upon the securing of funds to replace the field, the selection of a new field was based on the improved technology and advancements within the synthetic field industry. The new carpet is a 2 ½-inch, 36-ounce lead-free monofilament fiber. The monofilament fiber is a single strand that is designed to not break apart. The infill advancements include rounded silica sand, washed of fine materials, and cryogenic rubber.

Selecting a contractor and purchasing a field were the final aspects to allow the project to begin. Within the options of the purchasing process, the contract was developed so that the replacement process could begin. A sole source contract was used because of the agreement with Players Turf USA and Nike, that the Nike Grind (ground up, recycled shoes) would be a part of the infill.

The replacement process began with the removal of the existing field. The installer was fortunate to find a plastics recycling company, Agri-Plas Inc., Brooks, OR that was interested in receiving the old carpet fibers and backing to melt down, with the intention to create nursery container pots. The recycling company preferred that the sand and rubber infill was completely removed. Initially, an air compressor was used to blow the infill to the surface and a heavy street broom swept the infill to the sides. About 140 yards of collected infill was used to topdress eight surrounding natural turf fields. This infill was tested for metals and lead, to alleviate the concern of health and environmental risks. The topdressing was a thin layer that quickly worked its way into the soil profile.

The removal of the infill was challenged by a late August rain that basically cemented the remaining sand and rubber infill into the fibers but fortunately the recycling company was still interested in receiving the carpet even with the remaining infill. The field was then cut into sections, and backhoes were used to fill containers that were trucked to the recycling company.

Options to dispose of the original field include recycling the carpet with a plastics recycling company, such as Agri-Plas, and using the infill as a topdress, or to reuse the carpet and infill in batting cages, driving ranges, or warm up areas. Landfill costs can be high with the weight of an aged field being approximately 8 pounds per square foot.

Once the original field had been removed we had an excellent opportunity to make additional upgrades and improvements such as base drainage, additional electrical connections, and improvements to irrigation for cleaning and cooling. It was also a good opportunity to address users' desired amenities such as a permanent corner kick flag holders, and improved fencing and netting to trap balls and protect the scoreboard.

The base repair was a significant priority once the entire field was removed. During the removal process, there was a lot of heavy vehicle traffic disrupting the original base. It was necessary to add more rock to raise the field level to its original grade. It was then laser graded, watered in, and rolled for adequate compaction. The field was graded with a 0.5% crown.

The carpet consisted of two varying blades of polyethylene monofilament fiber. It was installed with sewn seams that were precisely stitched so that when each 15-foot wide roll was connected, it would not show any gaps at the seams. The base was constantly raked and rolled to ensure the integrity of the laser grading upon completion of installation. The field was designed to have three primary sports laid out permanently, soccer in white, men's

Folder image courtesy of istockphoto.com

lacrosse in blue, and women's lacrosse in yellow. The lines were installed by sheep shearing the green fibers to expose the backing and then gluing the 4-inch colored line to the backing. If future construction is anticipated around your field, however, and you might have to temporarily move the turf, it is better not to install permanent lines.

The final phase of the project was to topdress the fibers with the infill of cryogenic crumb rubber, washed round silica sand, and Nike Grind. A driving street broom was used to raise the fibers upright, as well as a walk behind sweeper to raise the fibers on the inlaid lines. A small topdresser was loaded to distribute the sand and rubber in a layering technique deemed appropriate by the installer. Weather posed another challenge in this final phase of the project as rain made it difficult to evenly distribute the infill. This problem was solved with a rake implement created by the installer to help distribute the infill through the fibers and level it.

Once the field was completed, the installer said there would be some settling of the infill. After 2 months it was agreed that the infill level was higher than what was preferred. The installer then removed the top layer of infill to reveal more carpet fiber above the infill level. This process was performed again 6 months later when the desired level for playability was reached. The users of this new field have since expressed a high level of satisfaction with the playability and performance of the field.

Lessons are learned in a project of this magnitude. After this field replacement, the involved members learned the importance of evaluating the partnering of labor forces between the contractor and the owner, and to focus more attention and discipline to preserving the surrounding facilities. It would have been beneficial to have the base surveyed after the final grading and compacting, and to survey the field layout for accuracy. Also, it would be helpful to plan the project for periods of ideal weather!

The valued aspects of this replacement process are numerous. The entire field was recycled, including the packing materials of the new surface. The existing entities were intact such as the base, perimeter, and fencing. A new generation of fiber existed in the polyethylene monofilament that was soft, durable, and mimicked the look of natural grass. All of the new materials used were completely lead-free. The use of clean, round, silica sand was an upgrade, and the inlaid lines were installed very precisely. ■

Debra Kneeshaw has been the on-site sports turf manager at East Delta Sports Complex in Portland, OR, for 11 years. She personally supervised the replacement process of a synthetic sports field in 2008.

By Michael Buras, CSFM

can be *tool of success*

AS SPORTS TURF MANAGERS

we all have the challenge of communicating what we actually do. Much of our work is done while no one else is around. Players, coaches, spectators and administrators attend a game or practice and don't get to see the work that went into preparing the field. Most people do not have much information about the art and science of being a sports turf manager and may understandably assume your job is mowing the grass once a week.

In my role as grounds superintendent at the Longwood Cricket Club, I run into communication issues all the time. The tennis club has more than 1,000 members and I report to a general manager and a grounds chairman. Giving them all clear and current information on all aspects of the grounds and 44 tennis courts can be a challenge. The best way I have found to improve the situation is to be a better communicator, and it is not easy.

In talking to other sports turf managers, this seems to be a common hurdle. At Longwood, improving communications has included talking to members, writing for the club newsletter and putting notes in club email blasts. I even gave a 2-hour introductory turfgrass seminar for members so they could learn about the hard work and dedication of their grounds staff.

These approaches have worked well, but we needed to convey more information to membership. So we created a blog maintained solely by the Longwood grounds department. It has proven to be quite successful.

Wikipedia says "A blog (a contraction of the term "web log") is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. 'Blog' can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.

"Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, Web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs."

Creating a blog may sound difficult, cumbersome and time consuming, but it is not. It is professionally satisfying and fun. There are many free websites that let you create a blog quickly. You definitely do not need a lot of computer knowledge to get started (I am proof of that!). Google's Blogger is the website that I use. Just go to Google, type in "blog." The first item to come up is "Blogger: Create your free blog." Just a few more clicks, open a free Google account, and the blog is created and ready to go! No experience necessary. Adding pictures and commentary can begin immediately. On the same Google account, a Google Analytics report can be set up to track how many people have looked at the blog, for how long and where they are from.

Once the blog is established, there are two major challenges: getting people to look at the blog and keeping the blog content fresh and updated so users want to keep coming back. Having the blog address mentioned in emails by you and fellow employees will go a long way in promoting the blog. Mention it to league officials and coaches, and you will be surprised at the amount of people that check it out. If your department has a website, make sure it includes a link to your blog. All of your correspondence should include the blog web

>> **MICHAEL BURAS, CSFM,** says blogging can help turf managers "communicate what we actually do."

address (mine is LCCgrounds.blogspot.com). Remember that anyone can look at the blog, so it is important to keep this in mind when posting entries. While ideas may come from employees, blog followers, anyone really, you should be the only administrator for the blog because it represents you.

Supplying content to a blog may seem onerous, but the effort is well worth it. Each entry can be brief, so it really is not a burden. Lots of pictures with commentary is a good way to start. It is helpful to have a small camera to record events for the blog. For example, an irrigation pipe breaks and is a major job to repair. Pictures of the broken pipe, repair work, and job complete, along with a short explanation would be an excellent entry showing crew skills and documenting problems corrected. Things that seem ordinary to a sports turf manager are not ordinary to others and make good blog entries. Some ideas to get started are:

- Agronomic work
- Field painting
- Turf equipment
- Irrigation
- Weather
- IPM
- Department goals
- Movies, links to YouTube
- Pertinent links – other sites you want your followers to look at
- Field conditions
- Highlight staff and their accomplishments

There is so much turf management and related information to write about that in the 2 years of managing my blog I have always had something to write about.

In addition to connecting with field users and supervisors, the blog can benefit in other ways:

- When fellow members of your grounds crew see themselves and their work online, it is an acknowledgement of their work and boosts morale.
- The blog can be helpful in hiring new personnel, as prospective employees get a feel of what it's like at your place of work.
- A blog can also help you get better connected with peers. For example, you have a blog entry on painting a logo and someone searches the web for logo painting and is led to your site. They may leave a comment on the blog or contact you to ask for more detailed information. Having a blog will definitely assist sports turf managers with similar problems, and successes unite and make professional networking easier.
- With so many questions about the environment, pesticides, organics and synthetic turf out there, the blog is a great way to articulate the facts about these and many other questions. The sports turf manager is often the best source for answers to these questions, but often the answers don't get to enough people, or are misconstrued. With a blog, the points you want to get across are in black and white for all to see.

With the straightforwardness of a blog at your disposal, a sophisticated web site is not necessary to promote the importance of your department. To obtain a budget increase, to get funds for a capital expenditure, or even to boost your salary, the value of what you do as a sports turf manager needs to be communicated. A blog is one of the tools you can use to educate sports turf novices of the skills, expertise and knowledge required to be a successful sports turf manager. ■

Michael Buras, CSFM is the grounds superintendent at the Longwood Cricket Club in Chestnut Hill, MA. His blog is LCCgrounds.blogspot.com

 By Sam Williams

Post-storm, Cowboy practice fields back in shape

Editor's note: Sam Williams is president of Sam Williams Advertising, Nacocchee Sautee, GA.

DURING A ROOKIE MINI-CAMP in May of 2009 a violent windstorm ripped into the Dallas Cowboy's practice dome making news headlines around the world. The dome's framework and fabric shell collapsed onto the players, coaches and field staff, while sending a sky-full of debris, trash and glass over their two adjacent outdoor practice fields. Miraculously no one was killed. Not surprisingly, both practice fields were ruined. You can spend the money to clean up and remove most debris, but you can't practice on fields embedded with glass shards from end zone to end zone. The Cowboys had no choice but to pull up the existing sod and get rid of it.

Fortunately Chris Morrow, field supervisor for the Cowboys, had already been talking to Gene Dahlen of King Ranch Turfgrass about re-doing his fields. During a conversation in early October, Morrow recalled, "Actually Gene came out about 2 years ago when we first started kicking around the idea of re-sodding. After the dome collapse we got the go-ahead to get it done full-speed-ahead, so I called Gene, went down to their Poteet, TX farm, picked out my 5-acres of TifSport, and got them to start duplicating the cultural practices I would be using at our facility. I also got them to initiate a grow-in fertility schedule to gear it up for being installed here."

» **Top Two images:** KING RANCH TURFGRASS CREW work new TifSport Bermudagrass sod into place.
» **Bottom image:** Turf was installed using 42-inch center-cut big rolls, which go down and transported easier.

Cowboy owner Jerry Jones and his family are famous for their hands-on management style, but they left all of the grassing decisions to Chris. He had been thinking about replacing the original Tifway 419 with new 419, but he liked the TifSport at Poteet a little better than the 419 there. "The TifSport was just more mature, by about 10-12 months, and the stolon and rhizome matt was far superior."

With the 2009 season fast approaching, Chris, an army of one, had a lot of work to do. After cleaning up from the storm's

wrath and disposing of the ruined sod, he went to work preparing the two practice fields for the new TifSport. "We had 18-inch crowns out here in the center of both fields, and we knocked them down and brought in 9 inches of sand for our rootzone mix. We sodded directly on top of that. We also put in new underground irrigation. Now we have Hunter heads at 50-foot intervals all the way down both sides of both fields. We're on city water, so the water quality is pretty much neutral. No problems there."

They sodded field #1 in late July, followed by field #2 exactly 2 weeks later. So Chris kept the players off of field #2 for 2 weeks longer than field #1. According to Morrow, "The TifSport on field #1 was only down for 27 days before we had our first practice on it. And that was the first week of the regular season. Thank goodness we had such great service from King Ranch, and Gene and the boys. We also wanted a grass grown on a sand base, because that's what we have here. The TifSport went down really fast. We were installing 42-inch big rolls, which we center-cut so they would go down easier and be easier to move around."

>> Above: **A ONE-MAN ARMY,** Chris Morrow is responsible for mowing, painting and fertilizing both Dallas Cowboys practice fields.

CHRIS MORROW.

Chris comes from a turfgrass background. He graduated from North Carolina State in 1995 with a degree in turfgrass management. In the spring of the following year, he was hired by the Carolina Panthers to be on their outside landscaping crew. After about a year he moved inside. His new responsibilities included taking care of the practice fields and helping maintain the game field. Chris adds, "I was basically doing the same thing for the Panthers that I'm doing here. I mow, fertilize and paint. And any cultural practices are my responsibility. I also take care of the landscaping surrounding the fields." The Cowboys hired Chris in 2002, and he's been with them ever since. Morrow's young but impressive career already includes an STMA 2004 "Field of the Year" award.

Chris admits he's got a lot to learn about TifSport. "Before I decided on TifSport, I went to the website and looked at a lot of the information there. I also talked to Terry Porch, who has TifSport on the Tennessee Titans practice fields. I knew Terry from my Carolina Panther days. We worked together for a couple of years in Charlotte before he took the Titans job. Terry was one of the very first sports turf managers on the professional level to have TifSport. And I talked to Don Follett when he was with the Redskins. He had good success with his." Follett is with the Baltimore Ravens now.

"I've been working with 419 for about 12 years now, so this is new to me, but I'm a pretty quick learner. Kevin Robinson has TifSport on his field at Keenan Stadium in Chapel Hill, and I know that Kris Harris had it when he was at Georgia Tech. I need to call them and pick their brains a little bit."

Chris is anxious to see how low he can take his new grass. "When my TifSport was still at the farm in Poteet, I got them to take the height of cut down to ½ inch, and I'm down to 7/16 inch here now. I'd like to go lower, but there's no way I can do that right now. I routinely used to cut 419 at 5/16, so I know I can get lower than that with TifSport. I watch Georgia Tech play whenever they're on TV and I love seeing that TifSport field on the screen. I know that in a year or two, I can have my fields looking like that. That's what I'm after."

TifSport has a finer blade than 419, and a darker green color. Morrow has also noticed that the stolons don't seem to move as fast as 419, "When this grass gets sheared, it grows back into the divot very quickly. It grows more from the bottom up rather than laterally, at least right now.

"I'm still debating about whether to overseed or not. Normally I would overseed if it were 419, but with this being new sod, I don't know how much competition I want next spring. So I may just not overseed, or I may overseed very lightly. I don't have any experience with how TifSport will handle overseeding. That's one of the things I'm going to have to learn. I do know that when Kris Harris was at Georgia Tech he overseeded his TifSport very heavily, and he started early. Jon DeWitt, who's managing the fields at Tech now, does the same thing. But I want a quick green-up next spring, and I don't want much competition.

"I'm also hoping that I can get a little further into the season before I start to see a decline in my TifSport's growth. I've heard it will go a little longer than 419. I'm going to keep up my fertilization program for as long as I can, for as long as it keeps growing and staying green."

When Chris was in the grow-in mode, he was pouring the coals to his new TifSport. "I was feeding it constantly. Now I'm starting to change gears into the maintenance mode. I still hit it with a foliar every 7 to 14 days. And I hit it with a granular in between to keep the color up and keep it growing. Right now I need as much growth as I can get on the top and bottom. Like I said, it's only been down 6 to 8 weeks, so I'll be paying close attention to see if I can figure out what it likes and dislikes. I'm excited about it though. It's a new frontier for me."

Chris mows his fields 6 days a week. "I give them the day off on Sunday, because Sunday is my day off too. But next year is when the real fun begins, because that's when I get to start aerifying it and topdressing it more. That's when I get to start putting my own fingerprint on it. That's when I'll find out if I can get my field mowed down shorter than Georgia Tech's.

"Even though this is a very young turf, the coaches and players like it a lot! There's better footing because of that healthy mat underneath. That's a lot easier on the players and their joints."

Dallas Cowboys head coach Wade Phillips likes to be outside, so the Cowboys practice outside regardless of whether they're going to be playing on real or artificial turf. "Phillips prefers grass, and I know the players like natural grass."

On a typical Monday after the Cowboys play on Sunday, which they do 98% of the time, the players come in and do film study, then head to the weight room. The strength coach comes out at about 3:15 and runs them for about 20 to 30 minutes. Tuesday is the player's day off. Wednesday is when practice really starts. They normally come out at 11 AM for a walk through, and then they're back out again at 1:00 for a full practice. This routine is duplicated on Thursday.

Friday is a little easier day. They're out on the field by 11:00 but don't have a walkthrough. Friday is normally about an hour and a half practice. On Wednesday and Thursday they go hard for about 2 to 2-1/2 and hours. Saturday is a walk-through-only day, and that takes about 45 minutes. So the players are on the fields at least 4 days every week. Chris has his own routine for keeping the fields' wear and tear in check, "We try to rotate the players as much as possible to keep the wear down. For example, "If we're on the southeast corner of field #1 in the morning, we'll move to the northeast corner in the afternoon. The same holds true for field #2.

"Actually we use both fields during every practice, but we spread the players out. We only film on one field during any given practice though, and that's where we get our most severe wear. That's where the seven on seven and team drills are conducted. Again, we try to spread things out over both fields to keep the wear and tear to a minimum."

Except for the cheerleaders. "Right now the cheerleaders are using field # 1. And they're worse than the players. I can get the players to move around, but the cheerleaders won't move. They do their little spins and turns right in the same exact spot. Over and over. Cheerleaders can actually inflict more damage on the grass than the players. You wouldn't think that a 90-pound girl could hurt a football field, but she can! But who cares? ■