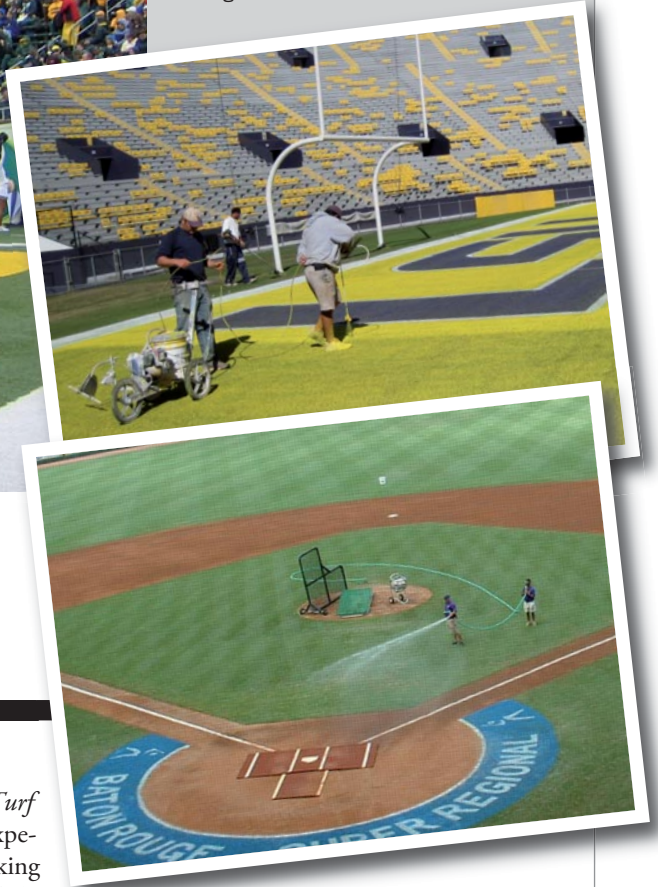




- » **Left: ERIC FASBENDER**, CSFM at the University of Oregon
- » **Below: PAINTING THE ENDZONE** at Tiger Field in Baton Rouge.
- » **Bottom image: FASBENDER** met with the baseball and softball coaches at LSU the same day he flew out of Eugene.



## Jumping right in best way to start new job

**I**N 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

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.

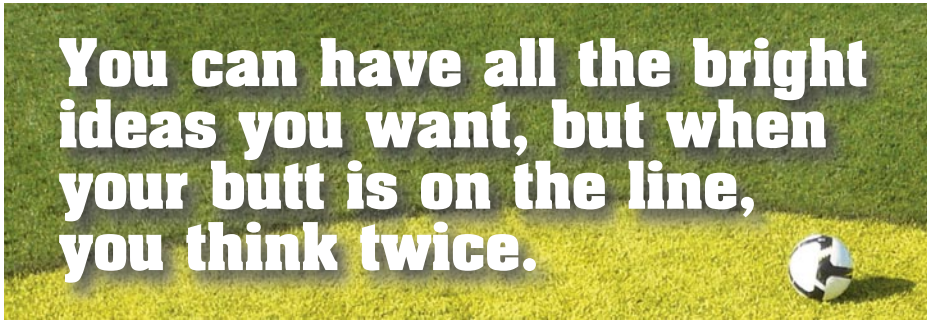
This past fall's season went by even quicker than the previous months. There was a lot of rain, in fact it seemed to rain every week that we had a home game. September's rainfall was 10 inches above average, October was 13 inches above; finally in November it began to level off. With that type of weather, 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,

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



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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 1/2-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

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

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



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

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