

# Q&A



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## Questions?

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# Happy graduation seeding

**THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT IT**, an anxious high school athletic director or coach will call about readying their weed patch of a football field for the upcoming season that starts in about 60 days. I make them listen to my full 10-minute lecture about having a plan for aeration, seeding, fertility, irrigation, traffic control ... you know the routine because you have heard it from me before.

I always finish with “so what is the name of your sports turf manager” just to show the need to have a position dedicated to managing and caring specifically for athletic fields. If you are an athletic director, coach, booster club volunteer or custodian you should realize that there is a local association of Sports Turf Managers that you can join to help improve your athletic facility. Encourage those managing the field to assume the role of Sports Turf Manager and encourage their involvement with STMA.

Most fields can benefit from some type of field maintenance procedure every month that the ground is not frozen. Even a frantic call in the middle of the summer deserves something better than it's too late to do anything now. Summer is not the best time to work on the field but for most high schools it is the first opportunity to access the field with nobody on it. So, to go along with some of the other field management slogans you have helped me develop such as “field within a field” and “don't be bare,” here is another to consider: “happy graduation seeding.”

Early June is time for high school graduation but it also needs to be marked on your calendar for re-seeding the center of the football field. This strategy realizes that you should also be seeding in the spring and fall even when fields are being used. In fact, the “don't be bare” strategy says to seed anytime that

the ground is bare and seeding will result in at least some additional turf cover. If you don't cover it with grass as soon as possible then it just opens up another spot for weeds.

For summer seeding I like methods that minimally disturb the ground but still put the seed in direct contact with soil. Drilling or seeding in combination with solid tining is preferred. A TriWave or SEEDA-vator are good choices. Broadcasting seed combined with topdressing is also a good choice to keep from disturbing the soil and exposing more weed seeds. Make multiple applications of divot mix (seed plus soil) until every bare area on the field is covered with grass.

Here is how our local high school athletic director gets the job done each year on the football field that also has spring soccer and track: In May he drills the high traffic section of the field with 80% Kentucky bluegrass and 20% perennial ryegrass at 3 lbs/1000 sq. ft. When soccer ends and immediately after graduation he broadcasts another 3 lbs/1000 sq. ft. of Kentucky bluegrass and buries it with about one-quarter inch of topdressing. In the summer heat the Kentucky bluegrass germinates in less than 2 weeks.

When he is really in a hurry he pre-germinates the seed and this gets it up in about a week. We start with Kentucky bluegrass in the spring and early summer and go to straight perennial ryegrass later in the summer if we are not filling in as fast as desired. By the first of July he has a pretty good idea just how successful his seeding has been. If it is not what he wants then he calls out the bucket brigade to drop divot mix into every open spot on the field. In fact, before he had seeding equipment it was the hand weeding and seeding that started the field on the road to recovery.

With a limited staff you proba-

bly don't consider hand seeding very practical, but if you are smart you will partner with the coach or athletic director who has 10 to 15 able bodied players at their disposal. Your work force is in the gym lifting weights and getting ready for the upcoming football season. You just have to be smart enough to also let them get their field ready for next season.

Start by letting them know you need some help; about 20 man hours or 10 players for 2 hours. Done two or three times during the summer and you will have a field with complete turf cover. Make your schedule fit into their workout day. Have everything ready because a coach doesn't like wasted time and people standing around; seed, sand/soil/compost (1 to 2 cubic yards), shovels and a 5-gallon bucket for each player. Roll the seed and soil mix together and keep trucking it to the players on the field. Fill the buckets half full so they won't be too heavy. One hundred pounds of Kentucky bluegrass will usually get the job done. It doesn't need to be all work so have a little fun and maybe have some sports drink on hand for them. If the coach buys into the project and participates then the team does a great job and every one leaves with a little more school pride, and that's what it is all about. ■

