

Managing a large soccer facility

THE ST. LOUIS YOUTH SOCCER ASSOCIATION (SLYSA) LEAGUE owns and operates a 104-acre, all-soccer facility, consisting of 16 11 v 11 full-sized fields and one small-sided 8 v 8 field. We also lease 24 acres next to our complex and have three 11 v 11 and four 8 v 8 fields at this location. Along with these fields we still rent a number of fields from eight other facilities in the St. Louis area.



>> ABOVE: Mark Vessell, Sr., executive director of the St. Louis Youth Soccer Association and STMA member.
BELOW: Larry Hull, working with a smile.

Our organization structure is composed of teams that play in our league, each of which has a vote that are reported by the Club Director for whom they play. The Club Directors then elect a group of five volunteer Board Members, and as a group the directors and Board give us the direction for the organization. We have eight full time staff members. These positions include: an Accounts Payable/Receivable, Secretary, Scheduler, Referee Assigner, Complex Superintendent, Complex Security/Maintenance Manager, Concessions Manager, and Executive Director. We hire two seasonal employees at the complex as needed. As with any position at any company, it is only work if you do not enjoy what you do. I am blessed to do something I enjoy every day; solving problems for the most part and getting others on board to help with the rest.

Managing sports facilities is never dull and is quite an interesting challenge. The reward is seeing the excitement of children of all ages just having fun on a quality, safe sports field. It is more than just about wins and losses; it's about the child's development and safety. With a quality field, you can see their skills develop both on and off the field that contribute to the child's self confidence, teamwork, and socialization. These skills develop tomorrow's leaders. High quality, safe fields is where SLYSA comes into play.

SLYSA provides a competitive soccer league. We are self-funded through league fees and a small amount of advertising dollars. The key to any business is knowing your target audience



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» **SLYSA COMPLEX** encompasses 104 acres.

and providing the best products and tools possible for that audience. Our constituents value quality fields, competitive age brackets, schedules at the start of the season, education, and communications so they know where and at what times games will take place. On average we schedule 250 to

300 games a week. To make this all happen I have a great staff of key people who care about what they do to and how it relates to make the total picture of success.

FULL PLATE AT WORK

My responsibilities include communica-

We explain the reasons why we cancel for rainouts and show the cost savings of what it would take to repair a damaged field, plus the time the field is out of service to heal.

» The complex underwater in June 2008.



» **ABOVE:** Sign of the future: 1st solar-paneled scoreboard in the USA. **BELOW:** Being proactive to protect the complex's turf.



tions, turf equipment, budget management, medical staff, concessions, irrigation controls, security, referees, radar monitoring, lighting detectors, net checks, painting lines, trash pick up, rescheduling, notification when rain outs occur, dust control of parking lots when to dry, computers, website support, phone hotlines—every week. Of course I rely on dedicated people who care and make it all happen every week. This list can be endless, and much more that one person can do himself, however with a great support staff and the “and then some” attitude espoused by George Toma, we get it done and make it happen, even when Mother Nature requires that we need to do 4 days of work in 2 days.

You must look at your facility from all perspectives. If you look at your facility through the eyes of a coach, parent, player, first-time visitor (who may have never played soccer), turf manager, security, insurance adjuster, an emergency personal responder, etc, it will make for a better facility. Make



list of things to do and work at getting the funds set aside to improve the facility. Most of all encourage and work with your staff. Help fix an irrigation break, mow a field, work with the security staff at an event, help in the concessions, etc.

I think one of the best shows on TV is "Undercover Boss." I work with my staff and see what they do and together we look at what changes could be made to make their job easier and more efficient. If you do not like to perform some task in your organization, chances are your staff does not like that same task either. Work together and find an easier way to get it completed. Less frustration saves time, makes for happier employees, and the time saved can be devoted to getting other things done. Times change and so must we.

AS ALWAYS, COMMUNICATION KEY TO SUCCESS

Communication with others is the key to success. There are so many different

mediums today and you must use them all or you will lose touch with your target group. Staying on top of new innovations in computer programs and web design, phone systems, text messages, e-blast, weather information systems, turf equipment, etc, all affect your budget and bottom line. Time saved and efficiency is money back into your budget for something else.

Communication and education to your user groups is vital in success. We try to explain to our Club Directors the cost of field repairs, irrigation repairs, trash collection, and so on because it is their money we are spending. If we spend half the time on trash we can spend time on other things to improve the complex. We have a policy of no warm ups in the goal boxes, for example; if we do not need to rebuild our goal boxes every season then we can spend that money to improve something else.

We explain the reasons why we cancel for rainouts and show the cost savings of

what it would take to repair a damaged field, plus the time the field is out of service to heal. We take opportunities to tell how our scheduler and grounds superintendent work together to not overuse fields; we keep track of age groups using the field, soil moisture, and number of hours of use on each field. We do not even allow warm ups in the goal boxes before games to help cut down on wear. We work with the Referee Assigner to run a reverse line in order to reduce wear problems on sidelines. We all want something better for our children than what we had as kids ourselves. Educate your end users. Never miss a board meeting or a Club Director meeting for the chance to get out the information or change a misinformed rumor. ■

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