

Let it snow



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IT STARTED with a call from a Chicago newspaper reporter 7 days before the Vikings vs. Bears game (Dec 21). The Metrodome roof had collapsed under heavy snow and there was a scramble to find a home for Monday Night Football. TFC Bank Stadium, home of the University of Minnesota, was an option if they could get the snow removed and all the parties would agree. The players union was concerned for player safety, the Vikings had 60,000 potential season ticket holders to fit into 50,000 seats, and the fans need “facilities.”

NFL and University officials were gathering information and making a plan when ESPN reported about warming chemicals that were being considered for use on the field. The next day a Chicago reported called me and immediately asked “why are they putting chemicals on the University of Minnesota football field and won’t it kill the grass and hurt the players?”

I was first annoyed because he had his facts wrong, the surface was synthetic rubber-infill, and then I was annoyed at myself for not knowing anything about chemicals put on fields to thaw them out. I have done lots of research on turf-grass phytotoxicity from ice melt products but when ESPN said “chemicals” that stirs a whole different emotion of uncertainty in people. I knew about the snow storm and the roof collapse and I figured Mike McDonald, CSFM, the Golden Gophers’ turf manager would have his hands full getting the field ready.

I collected myself for a few minutes and then remembered several of the STMA training sessions we had on dealing with the media and some sound advice I’ve received over the years from hearing Steve Wightman explain that the media is going to tell a story because that is

their job; when the opportunity arises it is the sports turf manager’s job to help them understand our unfamiliar world of field management in simple terms, and to be as considerate and professional as possible. Bless you all for those lessons and they have served me well every time I feel my blood begin to boil about ridiculous misinformation that gets into the media about athletic field management.

I promised the reporter I would get right back with him in less than 30 minutes, hung up the phone, found the ESPN blurb, and called Mike McDonald. I figured he would be knee-deep in the snow-storm and up to another anatomical part in the potential media storm, and maybe he wouldn’t even take my call. But Mike’s a close friend through the Iowa and Minnesota Chapter Challenge we have each year and I was relieved to hear that robust voice on the line. You can tell when he is excited because I’ve heard that “Holy Cow” expression many times, like when he dropped a 45-ft banana putt on the 18th green in front of both teams to defeat me and claim the bragging title for the Minnesota Chapter. He was excited but this was serious. This was a definite challenge and possible defining moment for himself, his crew, and the Minnesota STMA Chapter he represents.

“Holy Cow, Dave, you ought to see what we got going on here. I’ve got a phone in each hand and if they would just let me do what I want we can get this cleared, but the media has hold of the story and everybody is weighing in: the Bears, the Vikings, the NFL front office, ESPN, and a host of other reporters.”

I thanked him for even taking the call and explained that I passed his name onto the reporter and that I needed to follow up with the call I had received. We talked for 15

minutes about his plan but it didn’t take but two sentences for me to realize that with the right cooperation and a little luck from the weather, they could produce a safe playable field for the game.

We met at the STMA conference in Austin and here is the rest of the story: The frozen field was really never an issue because there was no ice in or on the field, just snow. The mysterious warming chemicals that were recommended by the manufacturer, FieldTurf, were nothing more than sodium chloride or rock salt that is used to melt ice on sidewalks. Mike wanted to avoid ice melt materials because anything that melts can turn to water and re-freeze into ice that would greatly increase hardness and skating. (Buffalo used ice melt products to remove surface ice on their field once but the rock salt made the surface slippery and they recommended against using it if possible.)

For future reference, we have used shallow settings with solid tine aerifiers to break up ice on putting greens without harming the grass surface, so I think it would work for synthetic athletic fields if needed. If sun and time are available, black turf paint or green turf dyes have been used to melt snow and ice on grass fields, but you still have the issue of refreezing as the snow melts.

Mike and his crew, Josh Graham, Mat Grosjean, and Andy Johnson, were given the go-ahead on Tuesday to clear the 18 inches of snow on the field as fast as possible, so they cleared the endzones and sidelines to give operating room for snow that would eventually be shoveled from the stands in 2 days by 1,400 temporary hires. They started shoveling on Wednesday, but Thursday was the big push for clearing the stands. It was all the crew of four could do to keep up with the snow coming down from the bleacher crew, using

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five dump trucks and two rubber-bladed pushers. Moving the trucks down the ramp and to the endzone seemed to be the bottle neck of the operation.

Mike's university crew teamed up with NFL head groundskeepers Ken Mrock of the Bears, Grant Davisson of the Vikings, and Andre Bruce of the Kansas City Chiefs, to finish getting the field ready. Each team and the NFL send a representative to lookout for their own interests, but these are also Sports Turf Managers, so you knew they were going to chip in. Kenny and Grant spent most of their time on the polar track broom machines while Andre took care of tarping the field. Covermaster velcro tarps were borrowed from nearby University of St. Thomas and hot air was blown under the tarp using four heaters supplying two million BTU's each. Scrambling most of the time, they used

anything heavy they could find to hold the tarp down; loaders, trucks, snow shoots.

Even though the field contained no frozen ice, the heaters dried the remaining snow and made the field softer and more playable. The tarps came off on Sunday for the team walk through and were replaced until final removal at 1pm Monday. It was a good thing, since 4 inches of snow fell Sunday night and continued through most of the game. The heated tarp kept most of the snow from accumulating but there was still some that had to be removed before the field tarp was removed for the last time.

All the snow was dumped at the fairgrounds where it was turned to water with a snow melting machine; don't ask, it's standard operating procedure in the Minnesota tundra, but the machine got clogged from the crumb rubber that was removed with the snow. One ton of rubber was placed back on

the field before the game. The teams were happy with the field condition and appreciative of the efforts to provide a safe and playable surface. The snow continued to fall so they switched to rotary brooms during the game that often gave the media on the sidelines a pelting of snow and rubber (we won't say who was operating the broom). The media would turn back side to take the blast of snow but legendary Bud Grant, former head coach for the Vikings, thrilled onlookers as he stood defiant taking on the native chill with a full front head butt. Mike said it was the highlight of a stressful week to remember that this tough old guy wasn't gonna let a little snow turn him away; that's the way the crew and the Minnesota community felt too. Nice work guys. To see a time lapse video of the process go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKZnYkY1uXk>. ■

STMA Affiliated Chapters Contact Information

Sports Turf Managers Association of Arizona:
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Colorado Sports Turf Managers Association:
www.cstma.org.

Florida #1 Chapter (South):
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Florida #2 Chapter (North):
850/580-4026, John Mascaro, john@turf-tec.com

Florida #3 Chapter (Central):
407-518-2347, Randy Fisher, rfisher@kissimmee.org

Gateway Chapter Sports Turf Managers Association:
www.gatewaystma.org.

Georgia Sports Turf Managers Association:
www.gstma.org.

Greater L.A. Basin Chapter of the Sports Turf Managers Association: www.stmalabasin.com.

Illinois Chapter STMA: www.ILSTMA.org.

Intermountain Chapter of the Sports Turf Managers Association: www.imstma.org.

Iowa Sports Turf Managers Association:
www.iowaturfgrass.org.

Kentucky Sports Turf Managers Association:
www.kystma.org.

Keystone Athletic Field Managers Org. (KAFMO/STMA): www.kafmo.org.

Michigan Sports Turf Managers Association (MiSTMA): www.mistma.org.

Mid Atlantic Sports Turf Managers Association (MASTMA) (formerly the Chesapeake Chapter STMA)
Ph. 410-704-2197 www.mastma.org

Minnesota Chapter STMA: www.mstma.com.

MO-KAN Sports Turf Managers Association:
www.mokanstma.com.

Nebraska Sports Turf Managers Association:
402/441-4425.

New England STMA (NESTMA): www.nestma.org.

Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey:
www.sfmanj.org.

Sports Turf Managers of New York: www.stmony.org.

North Carolina Chapter of STMA:
www.ncsportsturf.org.

Northern California STMA: www.norcalstma.org.

Ohio Sports Turf Managers Association (OSTMA):
www.ostma.org.

Oregon STMA Chapter: 503/953-9406

Ozarks STMA: www.ozarksstma.org.

Pacific Northwest Sports Turf Managers Association:
www.pnwstma.org.

Southern California Chapter: www.socalstma.com.

South Carolina Chapter of STMA: www.scstma.org.

Tennessee Valley Sports Turf Managers Association (TVSTMA): www.tvstma.com.

Texas Sports Turf Managers Association:
866/897-8621.

Virginia Sports Turf Managers Association:
www.vstma.org.

Wisconsin Sports Turf Managers Association:
www.wstma.org. (See Expanded Profile included in Chapter Highlights)

Forming Chapters:

Indiana Chapter:
Joey Stevenson, jstevenson@indyindians.com

STMA International Affiliate Organizations:
National Parks, Singapore: www.nparks.gov.sg

Sports Turf Association, ON, CANADA
www.sportsturfassociation.com

Forming International Affiliate Organizations
Irish Institute of Sport Surfaces
Institute of Groundsmanship

Chapter Sponsors



Chapter officer training from STMA

Board members from the affiliated chapters of STMA met for a training session at the STMA Annual Conference last month in Austin. Moderated by Chapter Relations Co-Chairs David Pinsonneault, CSFM, CPRP and Amy Fouty, CSFM, the 80+ in attendance heard two formal presentations and participated in roundtable discussions.

STMA CEO Kim Heck presented on the resources offered to chapters and the requirements of chapters to stay in good standing. She also gave a brief overview of good governance processes. Next, two past presidents from the Iowa STMA, Mike Andresen, CSFM and Joe Wagner, explained why their chapter needed new bylaws and how the new bylaws have made their chapter more effective.

Roundtables provided an opportunity for the chapter board members to discuss issues and share ideas from their chapters. Membership recruitment and retention is a challenge that most chapters are facing, with targeted communication and outreach to allied groups, unique membership pricing and high profile educational events offered as potential solutions.

The Chapter Relations Committee will meet via conference calls throughout the year to help strengthen the chapter structure and provide ideas and resources to help chapters be successful.