

From the Sidelines



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Pitchers & catchers

As I write it is only 24 days until the first spring training reporting date for MLB-rostered pitchers and catchers, a date that normally warms even the coldest hearts of baseball fans. Readers in the South and Southwest may be excited about the upcoming season but also in many areas they are already working on their baseball and softball fields, or at least pulling tarps to see what winter wrought.

The respite from outdoor activities that most turf managers in and north of the transition zone enjoy (or endure for some of you I suspect) includes the second week in January, traditional date for STMA's Annual Conference & Exhibition. It might be the only week on the calendar that the vast majority of members are able to get away from their facilities, the usually notable exception being those whose NFL employers are still in the playoffs.

This year's event, held 30 years after the association was officially formed by men who believed that sports turf could be improved through sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas, most likely would have astounded those founders in its volume of knowledge and ideas. Multiple education sessions were offered on topics such as sustainability, water, construction, agronomy, professional development, synthetic turf, and more. STMA sets up the event to maximize the chances of meeting people, comparing notes, asking advice, and making friends.

Another aspect of the Conference I always marvel at is the contributions made by two groups: Industry VIPs and association commercial member companies. While I'm certain not one of these people considers themselves a VIP, the cream of the crop shows for this meeting; some examples include Mike Andresen, Mike Boekholder, Dr. Jim Brosnan, Tom Burns, Bob Campbell, Murray Cook, Darian Daily, Larry DiVito, Chad Follis, Amy Fouty, Dr. Mike Goatley, Leo Goertz, Dr. Tony Koski, Ross Kurcab, Barney Lopas, Dr. James McAfee, Dr. Andy McNitt, Dr. Grady Miller, Dr. Dave Minner, Brad Park, Craig Potts, Dr. A.J. Powell, Dr. John Sorochan, Dr. John Stier, Mike Trigg, among many others.

The commercial member companies pay to exhibit their products and services and what a bonanza for sports turf managers—virtually anything you need to do your job is on display. Further, without the dough these companies produce, there is no Founders Awards, Student Challenge, golf tournament, or SAFE scholarships. Kudos to this year's conference sponsors: Barenbrug USA, Carolina Green, Covermaster, Diamond Pro, Hunter Industries, Jacobsen, Rain Bird, Toro, and World Class Athletic Surfaces.

A former pitcher, Troy Smith, was elected president of STMA. Smith is a Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) and becomes the fifth consecutive CSFM to be elected to head the organization. Here's to an early spring for all.

NFL at University of Minnesota follow-up

Last month in this space I wondered if the NFL and ESPN were forcing the issue by not postponing the Dec. 20 Monday night game in Minnesota after the Metrodome roof collapsed in the snow. Crews, led by University of Minnesota turf manager Mike McDonald, had to re-open TCF Bank Stadium for fans and prepare the synthetic turf for the game and there were concerns that the field would be too hard (for details, see p. 46). But, as you'd expect, McDonald and Friends, and a lot of volunteer snow removers, got 'er done and there were no significant injuries save one: the final knockdown of Brett Favre!

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