



►► **ROSS KURCAB, CSFM** on-site during construction of Invesco Field at Mile High in 2000.

Tips from NFL turf veteran Ross Kurcab, CSFM

ROSS KURCAB, CSFM, turf manager for the Denver Broncos, gave an engaging presentation on “sight turfing” as he calls it, at STMA’s Conference in January. Kurcab shared his observations on how by using their eyes, turf managers can increase their field management skills.

“How do you make critical decisions?” Kurcab asked the crowd. “Because it can be the difference between success and failure.

“There is no operations manual for a field; it’s the only part of any facility

that doesn’t have one,” Kurcab said to a nodding audience. “There’s no set standard for doing your job. It’s a cowboy world; you have to figure it out.”

Kurcab said in 26 years he’s never had a turf boss. “I’m a self-taught idiot,” he joked. He said he learns day to day and acknowledged that his situation, managing only one field, isn’t a typical situation for the audience, yet the sight-turfing approach has benefits for multi-field operations.

Several times in his talk Kurcab mentioned Attention to Detail. He mentioned having a back-up plan in

case your mower breaks down—do you have a 2nd mower or access to one?

“My style of field management is a daily read-and-react, using my eyes, which I consider my most valuable asset. For example once we had a coyote peeing on the field and it was making the grass greener around the outside of the spot, so I decided it needed nitrogen,” he said.

“You have to know how to look at your turfgrass and develop a working hypothesis on what’s going on with it. When you see something not green, address it. We see green best with our own eyes, it’s been proven scientifically,” he said. “I believe we see green better through evolution because our ancestors recognized green as a food source.”

SUNGLASSES ARE A TOOL

Kurcab called sunglasses, holding up the pair hanging around his neck, “light conditioners” and pointed out the safety factor in wearing sunglasses. He said polarized sunglasses are safe against UV rays, reduce glare and increase clarity. “If you are getting too much glare in your eyes, you are getting too much light; that glare can be coming from your turf,” he said.

“The lens tint makes a difference. I’ve found a green tint provides the best color contrast. Copper, rose and brown lenses are better for sight-turfing, as they minimize the green and blue ‘wash’ and clarify any turf off color,” Kurcab said.

“I call my purple lens-glasses my “plant stress detection” glasses. That color is the best for seeing where it is NOT green. I recommend purple for giving you advanced notice of disease and other potential problems. “Give your eyes time to adjust to the purple lens,” he said. “They work best in bright sunlight and are great for wilt patrol but they aren’t for everyday 24/7 use.”

SIGHT TURFING TIPS

Kurcab shared some ideas on using your vision to improve your turf. “See what you are not looking for,” he said. “Look for tonal contrast and ask yourself ‘Why?’ if anything’s not green. And look at your turf from different sun angles, especially looking toward the sun which gives more tonal contrast.”

“I think you should practice your sight turfing. Don’t do it just on your field but your lawn, when you’re at a park, wherever. Practice seeing the contrasts. Look macro and look micro,” Kurcab said. “Don’t walk

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past colors that look off. I try and diagnose 'every day and in every way'. I get a working hypothesis and try to get an action plan for what I just saw.

"You can't sight turf unless you know how grass plants grow in soils; you need some education and you can get it online these days."

He said a turf manager's job description is basically a "daily update on working hypotheses." "Your maintenance plan should include a daily read-and-react. Sight turf your field(s) during the game. Watch the play from the knees down. Watch different position players and skill-types. Note the footwear being used. How is the field or pitch performing? After the game, check the depth of the divots whether they are "skates, moguls, flaps, wrinkles or blowouts," he said.

TIPS

If others come to look at a problem, don't try to sell them on your theory of what's wrong, Kurcab advised. "Let them

have their own diagnosis, maybe it will help."

Other tips included managing the weakest link on your field; doing no harm—grass often knows how to solve the issue; and remembering sometimes taking no action is the best action.

Kurcab said it's key to find out if your problem is man-made or natural. "See a straight line of trouble? That's likely man-made.

Kurcab said when tackling a problem make sure you determine if it is a safety issue, a playability issue or an appearance issue. "Remember in football, it's between the sidelines that is important. Be sure to consider how much time you have to mitigate a problem if it's not affecting play. Teach your crew to sight turf to multiply the number of eyes watching the field," he said.

"The best advice is no good if you can't execute it though. Try and boil down your plan to a simple sentence. Analyze the effectiveness of past treatments or solutions," he

said. "And always save a spot where you don't spray when trying a different product; use it as a control spot to check for effectiveness of that product."

Kurcab urged the audience to use all their senses, with a nod against tasting your turf. But smelling is fair game. "Only sports turf managers smell their own turf," he said.

He recommended managers use a digital camera and its cheap storage to take a lot of pictures of your turf and to consider making a video as your check your fields that includes a running commentary about the issues. He mentioned the infamous band camp that he wanted to make sure he remembered about the next year.

Kurcab closed by responding to a question about his biggest challenges as a turf manager. "I can figure out the fields; it's managing people and staying calm in a stressful environment that is most challenging to me." ■

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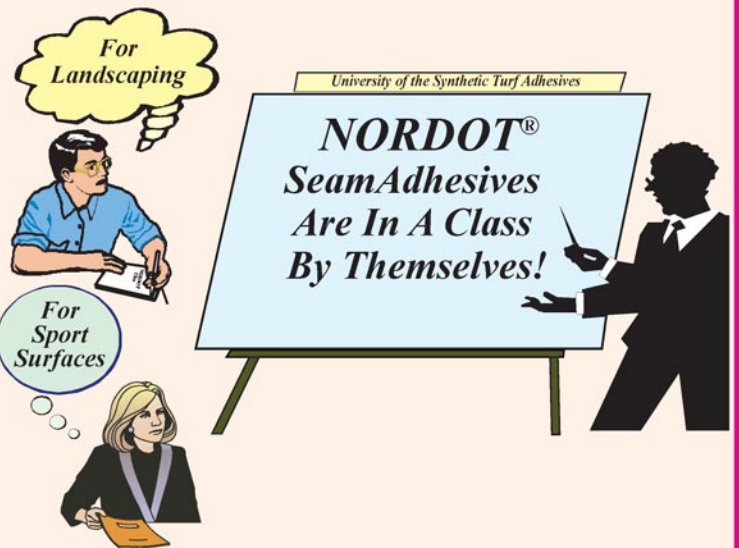
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