

From the Sidelines



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Education opportunities shouldn't be missed

IN MY MORE THAN 25 YEARS covering educational events and trade shows in industries including construction, auto repair and dentistry as well as turfgrass, I've witnessed some terrific programs and some real clunkers. As well-intentioned as an organizer might be sometimes you get a dud, whether because of unforeseen circumstances, poorly prepared presenters, or ill-conceived program choices.

It may appear self-serving but I'll go there anyway: in my experience, the Sports Turf Managers Association and their affiliated chapters take a back seat to no one in pulling off great and useful events. Last month I was in Knoxville for the Southeast Regional Conference that was put together by National STMA HQ and six regional chapters: Tennessee Valley, Kentucky, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia. It's difficult to imagine an attendee leaving this event thinking, "I didn't learn a damn thing."

The event was held at the University of Tennessee (my eyes readjusted from all the orange in a few days) and, just as was the case last summer in Seattle, the venue brings much to the event. Like many of you, I'm a sports fan and get a thrill from getting to see and be in places most people don't—for example, standing midfield at huge Neyland Stadium or touring the Volunteers' first-class locker room. The Vols' indoor practice facility would dwarf most airplane hangars, it is huge!

But the facility tours are cake icing compared to the workshops. Those in Knoxville heard from most of the turf team experts from the University: Drs. John Sorochan, Tom Samples, Brandon Horvath and James Brosnan, plus research techs Adam Thoms and Marty Wallace as well as university turf managers Darrell Denney, Darren Seybold and Jimmy Andes. Also on the program were regional big hitters such as Dr. Mike Goatley from Virginia Tech, Dr. Grady Miller from North Carolina State, Eric Fasbender, CSFM, who manages fields and facilities at LSU, and long-time industry leader Bill Marbet, president of Southern Athletic Fields.

And as you might expect, topics related directly to the region, with lots of information on bermudagrass, including new information from National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) traffic trials, managing bermuda to prevent winter injury, and info from Dr. Samples on the best new bermudagrasses for athletic fields (appears there are some real winners soon to arrive from the minds at Oklahoma State).

Other topics covered included field painting, using field covers, pest management, and a number of talks and demonstrations on maintaining infield skins for baseball and softball (not exactly the same thing I learned). And it should be noted that if you signed up before the event, all this, plus some meals, transportation, and CEU credits, not to mention the trade show with national and regional vendors, cost \$95!

We all have a bag of excuses we dip into when it comes to things we know are good for us but for some reason are reluctant to do. Next time you have a chance, pass on the broccoli but not these education opportunities from STMA. They are more than worth the effort and expense.

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