

# From the Sidelines



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## Growing field use demands turf knowledge

**S**PORTS TURF AND RELATED VENUES continue to be in demand because more kids than ever are playing sports and field sports are particularly strong. Participation in high school sports increased for the 22nd consecutive school year in 2010-11, according to the annual High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS). NFHS members reported for the 2010-11 school year broke the record with 7,667,955 participants.

The number of field sports is holding strong compared to the number of indoor sports or those using other facilities. The top 10 sports for boys, in terms of numbers of students participating, were (from 1-10 in ranking): 11-player football, outdoor track and field, basketball, baseball, soccer, wrestling, cross country, tennis, golf and swimming/diving. Among girls, the top 10 were outdoor track and field, basketball, volleyball, fast-pitch softball, soccer, cross country, tennis, swimming/diving, competitive spirit squads and lacrosse.

Among girls' sports, the emerging sport of lacrosse led the way with an increase of 9% from the previous year. With 74,927 participants nationwide, lacrosse cracked the girls Top 10 listing for the first time as it moved past golf. Outdoor track and field was close behind lacrosse, followed by soccer, volleyball and cross country.

All this activity demands turf management and that's where you come in. With safety and playability foremost in mind, many turf professionals already take advantage of available resources to enhance their skills. But those of you who may be reluctant for any reason, I urge you to reconsider. Last winter I attended the annual conference put on by the Keystone Athletic Field Managers Organization (KAFMO), one of the oldest conferences of its kind in the nation, here in Pennsylvania.

More than 300 turf guys and gals attended the 16th version of this event, which raises money for chapter activities including scholarships and university turf research grants. Educational sessions included a panel discussion on how to handle fields that have been flooded. [Tim Foreman of the Harrisburg (AA) Senators got a laugh from the crowd when he said he's seen three separate "100-year floods" in his 19 years with the team!]

For not the first time, KAFMO's program included the current national STMA president, which this year is Dr. Mike Goatley of Virginia Tech (see page 7). Dr. Goatley spoke on strategies for spring recovery, including making points regarding use of rollers (it's wrong to say "never use rollers" per compaction issues; see Dave Minner's "Q&A" on rolling page 46); off-season lip maintenance; use of turf covers to "accelerate and manipulate" turfgrass; and being smart with your spring fertilization timing to both save money and protect the environment. Dr. Goatley advised, "Don't sacrifice your fields' safety no matter what; a safe field is not necessarily a good-looking field."

Other sessions included Dr. Peter Landschoot of Penn State's update on the progress of fertilizer regulation in the state; Mike Shelley, a graduate student at Penn State, shared his findings from research on establishing fields with tall fescue in the summer; and Tom Serensits, manager of PSU's Center for Sports Surface Research, shared the latest information on what herbicides to use in specific situations and time frames.

All STMA Chapters have educational sessions and conferences, field days, test drives, etc., events where you can learn how to be better and work smarter. If you're not taking advantage of those that you can, you may be selling your fields, and yourself, short.

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