

Jack Trice Stadium, Iowa State University

- ◎ **Level of Submission:** College
- ◎ **Category of Submission:** Football
- ◎ **Head Sports Turf Manager:** Tim VanLoo
- ◎ **Title:** Athletic Field Manager
- ◎ **Education:** Master's Degree in Turfgrass
- ◎ **Experience:** Spartan Stadium, 2004-2007 (graduate assistant); Northwestern University, 2007-2010 (athletic field manager); 2010-present at Iowa State as athletic field manager
- ◎ **Other crew to recognize:** Josh Lenz,

Kevin Hansen, Adam Gregerson, Ethan Dykstra, Joel Rieker, Zach Simons, Josh Meyn, and Colton Metzger.

- ◎ **Original construction:** 1996
- ◎ **Turfgrass variety:** Many different varieties of Kentucky bluegrass
- ◎ **Overseed:** We seed in the spring and throughout the football season in the fall. The field gets a total of 1000 lbs of Kentucky bluegrass seed throughout the year.
- ◎ **Drainage:** Traditional herringbone

CHALLENGES

Our biggest asset is also our biggest struggle; let me explain. I am the only full-time employee dedicated toward the athletic fields and athletics grounds. We fill the void in manpower with students. These are all turfgrass students working through the University's Horticulture Department. We rely heavily on them "buying in" and "taking ownership." I would be lying if I told you that they all did, but most do. This is my third season at ISU and every year we have had different personnel. Different personnel each year makes "getting in a routine" impossible, but it does allow for many "teaching moments." Throughout the summer I had five guys working for the athletic department on the fields and common areas. In the fall we bump up to eight students because they are limited to 20hrs/week due to state law. The crew this year has been in-

▼ **FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:** Blake Nelson, Tim VanLoo, Kevin Hansen, Adam Gregerson, Josh Lenz, and Colton Metzger.



strumental in the success that our fields have been having, especially Jack Trice Field.

This year's weather has proved to be the most difficult of my career. We have had one of the worst droughts on record coupled with very high temperatures. Our irrigation has been working overtime since June and has not been able to stop. The disease pressure was low, but dealing with daytime temperatures near 100 degrees for multiple weeks was something I had not experienced. Our cool season turf was stressed from June through August with above average temperatures.

The crew and I did as much as we could to keep the grass cool and moist. Closely monitoring moisture levels with a Spectrum TDR Field-scout was instrumental in helping us keep a good moisture level without overwatering. We would check moisture levels each afternoon to help us set up the irrigation for the next morning. We also would compare what the ET data that our weather station would calculate. Between those two tools we were able to keep adequate moisture levels without overwatering.

With the above average temperatures root growth was of high concern. We continued to aerify and top-dress throughout the summer. We hollow tined four different times from April through July affecting about 23% of the surface area in total for the year. Since August we have needle tined five times. We were just trying to ensure that the plant could respire as much as it could in the temperatures that it was trying to survive in. I think that staying aggressive with the aerifier proved to be crucial in sustaining root growth throughout the hot summer.

SportsTurf: What channels of communication do you use to reach coaches, administrators and users of your facility? Any tips on communicating well?

VanLoo: I use many channels of communication: text, email, phone, and face to face. The type of communication depends on the situation and coach. I have found that face to face or phone call is the best when situations are uncertain and many scenarios can play out. Emails are the best for me when schedules and specific needs are being asked for in advance. Text can work for this, but I always fear forgetting about it, when it's in my inbox I won't forget.

The few times where emotions can get high, I feel it's very important to speak face to face. You and the coach or staff person are less likely to say something that can be taken the wrong way if it's in person. Reading emotion from people is very important, and face to face discussions are the only way to be accurate.

ST: What are your specific job responsibilities?

What do you find most enjoyable? What task is your least favorite and why?

VanLoo: My specific job responsibilities are and not limited to: Jack Trice Stadium, Johnny Majors Practice Field, Two-a-Days Practice Fields, Bergstrom Indoor Facility, Cyclone Sports Complex (Softball, Soccer, and Track), Cross Country Course, and all the landscaping and grass that surrounds our athletic facilities. About 55 acres total, only 15 acres irrigated.

The most enjoyable part of my job is the students. My entire staff is made up of Iowa State turfgrass students. Working with students on the application of classroom principles and helping to prepare them to become future turf managers is the goal. I rely on them to do every part of what it takes to prepare our fields. There is a lot of freedom to manage each other and find tasks that need to be done. Sure, there are many mistakes made, but learning from mistakes is sometimes the best education. I had the privilege of having many great mentors as I learned the industry; my hope is to return that to the students that I have been given the opportunity to work with.

The least favorite part of the job would probably be paper work and University processes. I know it's a necessity, but that doesn't mean I have to like it!

ST: How did you get started in turf management? What was your first sports turf-related job?

VanLoo: I got started in the turf industry in high school. I started working for a driving range and maintained a practice putting green. After high school I started working for a country club.

My first sports-related turf job was growing in Spartan Stadium field while an undergraduate at Michigan State University. We grew it in modules offsite and moved them in the following year. That first summer I helped water and maintain the seeded Kentucky bluegrass field. That project hooked me into sports turf management.

ST: How do you balance your work and personal time?

VanLoo: Balancing work and personal life is a constant give and take. I have been blessed with a very supportive wife who understands that certain times of the year demand much of my time at work. Without her support I could not be successful in this career. When times slow down I do my best to make sure my family knows they are my number one priority.

ST: What changes are you planning to make



or have you made to your maintenance plan for 2013, if any?

VanLoo: Any changes this year will be a reaction to the weather. I am a creature of habit so I don't like to stray very far from what has worked before, but Mother Nature usually forces me to change something. In my three seasons at Iowa State I have been through a record-breaking flood and a record-breaking drought. I am hoping for a statistically "normal year" this year.

ST: Are you yet involved in "sustainable" management practices? If so, what are you doing?

VanLoo: The sustainable practices that we have adopted focus on water conservation and precise pesticide applications. We use ET and TDR soil moisture sensors to determine irrigation schedules. I like proof in numbers to back my decision to water. For the precise pesticide applications we use a GPS equipped sprayer. The single nozzle control doesn't allow any overlap. This ensures accuracy of application and doesn't allow for over application anywhere. Agriculture has been using this technology for many years, proving its reliability.

ST: How do you see your job changing in the future?

VanLoo: This is hard to say. I don't imagine its gets any easier! College sports are a growing business with more and more demands on all who are involved. I like change, so I am excited about the future and what it holds for me. ■