

President's Message

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Against the odds

I JUST FINISHED MALCOLM GLADWELL'S LATEST BOOK "DAVID AND GOLIATH." The author offers another thought provoking book that challenges conventional wisdom regarding the underdog, a term common to sport competitions. Gladwell proposes that perhaps Goliath was not really such an overwhelming favorite after all. Sure, he was a giant among men for his time in size and stature, equipped with the finest armor and weaponry. However, Goliath was apparently very slow-of-foot, had problems with his eyesight, and was prepared only for hand-to-hand combat. David, on the other hand, was a youthful shepherd (at the bottom of that era's social ladder), and his appearance as Goliath's challenger was met with mockery and derision by his opponent.

However, it turns out that David was quite a 'slinger': highly skilled in using stones to kill wild beasts that threatened his flock. He was deadly accurate with his sling, and he had competitive advantages of speed and surprise on his side. David never intended to fight Goliath in close quarters.

Underdogs regularly pull off major upsets on our athletic fields and these upsets are hard to predict based on the apparent talent discrepancies on paper. However, superior talent doesn't always overcome the will, desire and discipline displayed by seemingly less gifted athletes. Similarly, in sports field management I am amazed by how forward-thinking sports field managers overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges imposed by Mother Nature, budget and/or personnel limitations. There is no doubt that experience matters. David gained his slingshot skills while protecting his flock; you hone your skills plying your trade season after season. Still, experience alone can't overcome the importance of being properly equipped for the job. David didn't attack Goliath with boulders, but instead he selected very specific sizes, shapes, and weights of stones that allowed him to fight his enemy from a safe distance. As a sports field manager, you also need to be properly equipped with the right tools and strategies to overcome the challenges you face in delivering safe, great looking, and great playing athletic fields.

One of the best ways to equip yourself is to secure and apply the management strategies you will experience firsthand at the 2014 annual conference and exhibition in San Antonio this January. Whether on the trade show floor, in the classroom, or simply by word-of-mouth, your chances of overcoming the challenges you face in your job will grow by joining your colleagues at conference. STMA's conference programming committees have once again assembled a great mix of educational activities and site visits suitable for all levels of sports turf managers, regardless of facility, budget, or background.

In closing, November is synonymous with Thanksgiving for many of us. I suspect that David was very grateful that he had such good aim. I find myself grateful every fourth Thursday in November for a) wonderful family and friends, and b) turkey, dressing, and sweet potato casserole. How about you? I hope you can find some time to reflect on your blessings this season. Take care. ■

Mike Goatley