

Important things in life: “Moore” than grass

HOW OFTEN IN LIFE DO WE TAKE THINGS FOR GRANTED? How often are we so caught up in our jobs and responsibilities that we just stop for once what we are doing and be thankful for what do have? Our families and relatives, our house, our cars, our jobs...when we are faithful and take that precious moment before we head to our professions for the day and be thankful and gracious, giving hugs and kisses to our loved ones. On May 20 and 21, 2013 all things changed in central Oklahoma.

We in Oklahoma live in what is commonly known as Tornado Alley, in the late

spring where the cold air coming over the Rocky Mountains clashes with warm moist air out of the Gulf of Mexico. During a stretch of time in May this year, tornadoes were popping up daily. We commonly are the guinea pig for weather as the nation can see where the storms are building and coming from. In a 14-year span, Moore, OK has received two EF5 and one EF3 tornadoes in almost the same path. (see http://s.imwx.com/common/articles/images/201305/mooretrack-52113_650x366.jpg).

Various other towns in Oklahoma such as Little Axe, Shawnee, El Reno and Yukon

◀ **TWO EXAMPLES** of damage from the tornado.

have received their fair share of tornadoes. As a matter in fact, one week after the tornado in Moore, the widest tornado ever recorded, 2.6 miles wide, hit near El Reno, OK.

In Oklahoma, the forecasters and meteorologists are right on top of the weather when the atmosphere is unstable. It is a Mecca for storm chasers as they come in droves when things are in alignment. In Norman, the National Weather Service houses its National Storm Center and is very informative to the general public. On May 20, tornadoes skirted the heavily populated areas in central Oklahoma, but did hit some of the rural areas. However, the metro area of Oklahoma City was forewarned that the same scenario was going to happen the next day, May 21, but supposed to be worse and to be prepared. Everyone was told about the time things were going to fire up on Monday. People at the beginning of the day were planning when they were going to take off work and pick kids up before schools were let out.

- 2:40 pm CDT: A tornado warning was issued that included Moore

- 2:52 pm: Radar indicates rotation may be reaching the ground near Moore

- 2:56 pm: First reports of a tornado in progress

- 3:01 pm: Tornado Emergency issued for Moore

- 3:36 pm: Tornado “ropes out” and dissipates

- 3:43 pm: First images of destruction surface

- 6:07 pm: Damaged areas in comparisons immediately drawn to Joplin, MO tornado of 2011

- 7:16 pm: Death toll announced at 37 by Associated Press, via Twitter

The tornado was on the ground for some 40 minutes. Eventually it was determined that 24 people perished during the tornado, including seven children. Some of the children were ones that were still at the schools of Plaza Towers Elementary and Briarwood Elementary, which were completely leveled. I personally was on the scene in Moore at about 8:30pm. I went

with a neighbor to help his son repair his damaged house, as more rain was expected.

Others were not so fortunate with their houses. I have never seen so much destruction immediately following an EF 5 tornado. Homes completely gone, down to the slab of concrete that it was built on, water coming out of pipes, telephone poles snapped and electric power lines laying on the ground and the heavy smell of natural gas, cars overturned and mangled, and debris spew all over the place wondering where it came from. There were members of our athletic staff at OU that completely lost their homes. People that I know whose families' lost everything. My wife and I housed a father and his son, displaced by the tornado, for a week at our house. So much loss. Initial estimates indicated that it will cost upwards of \$2 billion. It will take years to rebuild, just like in 1999; some say that it was worse.

One aspect of Oklahomans, they come together, as they have done so many other times in the past. People helping people; strangers pitched in and helped clean up Moore and the surrounding areas. Support from so many others across the nation. Native Oklahoman and country music singer Blake Shelton put on a benefit concert at the Chesapeake Arena in OKC that raised an estimated \$6 million. Triages and relief set up at the churches surrounding the damaged area. Meals, clothing, shelter all provided by people in the surrounding communities.

Country music star Toby Keith, a native of Moore who resides in Norman, decided to have a concert billed as the Oklahoma Twister Relief Concert. The site was Owen Field on the campus of the University of Oklahoma on July 6. To add to the docket, Garth Brooks, Trisha Yearwood, Ronnie Dunn, Willie Nelson, John Anderson, Mel Tillis, Sammy Hagar, a video performance by Carrie Underwood and a few other artists were scheduled. The concert sold out in less than an hour with a ticket price of \$25. The concert is speculated to be the largest concert ever in the state of Oklahoma, with an attendance of 65,000+. All

proceeds from the concert went to the United Way to go to those impacted by the tornadoes. So many aspects of putting the concert on were donated: field protection system, trucking, stage, rigging, lighting, equipment. All put together in a matter of 3 ½ weeks. Not an ideal time to be putting on a concert in July, when many of these things are spoken for the summer and other tours.

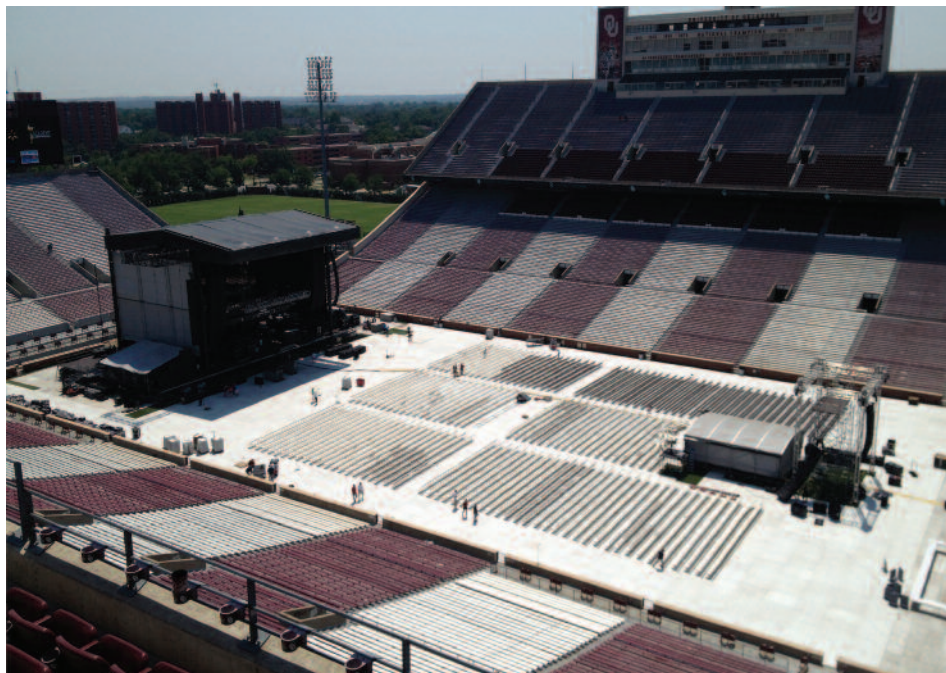
CHALLENGE AHEAD

This is where the turf manager's hat comes off; all the things of "No... not a concert in July during the heat of the summer!" instead are "how are we able to help people in need, people that have nothing?" This was an improvised concert but put together by some of the best in the business. All resources had to be pooled together quickly. Our challenge as turf managers at OU was to save as much as the field as we could understanding we were in a non-revenue, donating situation with this event. Our administration in OU Athletics assured us that any replacement needs would be fulfilled.

Once we received confirmation that we would be hosting a concert, the first phone calls I placed were to Michael Beane, CEO of Terraplas, and Kyle Waters, VP of Operations at the StubHub Center in Carson,

CA. Both have ties to Oklahoma, as Mike had a daughter here at OU in 1999 and Kyle is a native Oklahoman. Both immediately jumped on board in support. Mike supplied the Terratrak drivable roadway and Kyle provided the Terraflor. Load-in of the Terratrak started late Monday evening July 1 with the stage steel set-up starting on July 2. Three days of stage building, a production day and then the all-day concert. Terratrak around the stage was down 6 days, the Terraflor for the seating area was down just over 48 hours. During the 6 days while it was down, the Terratrak surrounding the stage received heavy use of forklifts, a 40-ton crane and two 5 ton flat-bed trucks. We were able to omit a Terratrak roadway in front of the stage during a majority of the stage build. This was key as we were able to keep the heavy weighted traffic off of the main area of the playing surface and off to the sideline areas.

Some stadium events you have months of preparation for, we had a couple of weeks. We felt we went into the Terratrak build with about the right amount of moisture in the sand base as well as supplementing the TifSport bermudagrass with ample amounts of potassium, magnesium and elements to strengthen the grass's cellular walls. We were also very lean on nitrogen and the field was rolled and firmed up with



► **SETTING UP** for the concert.



▲ **Top Left: USING THE GREENONE KORO MACHINE** to take out some sod after the concert. **Top Right: PUTTING IN THE FRESH SOD.**
Bottom: GOOD VIEW after sod was placed.

a 3 ton roller. The first week of July we actually caught a break in the weather as a cold front came through central Oklahoma bringing daytime highs in the low to mid 80's. Normally temperatures are in the mid to upper 90's. Soil temperatures under the Terratrak (81 F) were just a couple of degrees warmer than where grass was not covered (77 F). Most all Terratrak and Terraflor builds and removals were done in the overnight hours to help the install crews as well making the moves less stressful on the grass. By Production Day and Concert Day, ambient temperatures crept back up into the low to

mid 90's. We received the field back to us later in the evening Sunday, July 7.

We started our post-concert maintenance plan as soon as the last piece of Terratrak was removed. We did this in the wake of the cooler overnight hours. The field was raked to stand the grass back up where Terratrak has been laying around the stage and roadway out to the front of house mix tower. We let the field rest and sit the remainder of the night. On Monday, the entire field was verticut and swept to help the rootzone to breathe even more and to remove

any bruised or matted leaf tissue. An application of ammonium sulfate was made and water was turned back on. On Tuesday, the field was deep-tined aerified and cores removed. Then flushing cycles of irrigation water began to help remove contaminants. On Wednesday, weaker areas were overseeded with Riveria bermudagrass seed and the field was topdressed with sand.

The week after the concert brought good bermudagrass growing weather with temperatures in the mid-90s to 100, but that was followed by an unusual cold front that lasted 4 days and brought 6" of rain. Temperatures dove back into the mid-70s during this time and really putting a damper on recovery and coordinating with contractors to replace any damaged areas. The fourth week of July we were able to resod areas of heavy traffic on the roadway behind the stage as well as some weaker areas on the field. We contracted with GreenONE Industries, Inc to use the Koro Imants Field Topmaker to take out 1 1/2" of sod. We also purchased the replacement thick cut Tifway 419 sod from Tri-TexTurfgrass. In all, much less was replaced than was anticipated before the concert. Much of the rest of the areas under stage and on the field were able to make a full recovery.

In this particular situation and devastating event, it's more than just the grass. We do work so hard to get the grass to where we want it to optimally perform. We are passionate about our jobs and doing what is best for our fields. But grass can be replaced. It always helps to keep things in perspective. Be sure that we take time to appreciate the ones we really live for. You can't replace someone that



▲ **PICTURE OF FIELD** one month after concert ready for scrimmage.

you lost. We do take ownership in the fields that we manage, but in the words of a good friend of mine..."it's not your field." On this particular night, it was for those that had lost a loved one, a home, a business. This is a healing process that will take much longer... ■

Jeff Salmond, CSFM, is director of athletic field management at the University of Oklahoma, and a Board member of the Sports Turf Managers Association.

STMA in action

STMA introduces new Membership Incentives, Referral Rewards

STMA IS NOW OFFERING a number of incentives to new members and a referral bonus program, both designed to help the association build on its continued growth.

New Member Benefits

New members—those individuals who have not been an STMA national member since 2000—are now eligible to receive a **free conference registration** (valued at \$375, to be used within 3 years) when they purchase an STMA membership. This new member offer is valid for the association's sports turf manager and commercial categories, including individuals at the associate level (sports turf manager and commercial associates). Unfortunately, new affiliate and student members are not eligible for the free conference registration benefit.

Those members who joined in 2013, especially those individuals who signed up during the association's recent prorated dues

promotion, are eligible for the free conference registration promotion if they renew for 2014.

To see if you qualify for the free conference promotion, please visit www.STMA.org or call the STMA office at 800.323.3875.

STMA Referral Rewards

All STMA members are eligible for the association's new referral rewards program. Any current member who refers a new qualifying individual that signs up for a membership will receive a \$100 voucher that can be used on a variety of items, including STMA merchandise, conference registration fees or membership dues. There is no limit to the number of new recruits a member can refer; he/she will receive the \$100 voucher incentive for each new person they refer who signs up.

Stay tuned for more details at www.STMA.org. ■

