and Cardinals shared Busch Stadium when their seasons overlapped last summer. The Rams recently moved to their new stadium.)

At Miami's Joe Robbie Stadium, where the existing P.A.T. system was replaced by an entirely new state-of-the-art P.A.T. system this year, weather conditions brought an additional challenge to head groundskeeper, Alan Sigwardt and his crew. September was filled with heavy rainfall, making moisture levels within the skinned portion of the field difficult to control.

An article by Steven Wine for The Associated Press, picked up in the September 19, 1995, issue of USA Today, contained several comments from Sigwardt. He says, "We have good turf-growing weather, but having to protect and baby that piece of dirt is difficult." To anyone who has experienced the Florida rains, this is obviously an under-

**Principals in Joe Robbie's renovation were Joe Motz, president and CEO (left), and Mark Heinlein, senior vice president, of The Motz Group.**

statement. The skinned area was removed and the infield resodded with big roll sod at the end of the Marlins’ season.

Still, even during the less-than-ideal conditions, the players love that turf. Wine’s article quotes Dolphin's linebacker Bryan Cox, who says, "Even with the infield dirt, I'd rate our field above all the (artificial) turf fields."

Wine reported Steelers' running back Bam Morris as saying of the Three Rivers Stadium, "It's dangerous. You've got artificial turf, you've got home plate, first base, the pitcher's mound and in some spots, you've got lumps where those mounds are. It's a bad field, but we've got to play on it."

This reinforces the survey results announced by the NFL Players Association in January 1995. In that survey, Joe Robbie Stadium was ranked second among the most preferred stadiums by NFL players.

Additional results of that survey revealed that 93 percent of NFL players believe that artificial turf is more likely than grass to contribute to injury. Fifty-four percent identified an artificial turf injury they suffered that they believe would not have happened on grass. Ninety-one percent believe artificial turf is more likely to shorten their careers. Ninety percent believe artificial turf is more likely to worsen their quality of life after football.

**Kansas City Gets Real**

Artificial turf got the boot in Kansas City during 1994. Natural turf now provides the playing surface in the stadiums of both the Royals and Chiefs.

Though murmurs spread among the city’s baseball fans of turf disease problems throughout the summer of 1995, extended periods of 100-degree temperatures and 90 to 95 percent humidity levels should be expected to do some damage. High-use turf on golf courses and sports fields throughout the Midwest suffered during this period. Play in the Kauffman Stadium (for the Royals) put more stress on that new turf than that of the relatively idle Arrowhead Stadium (for the Chiefs). Still, reports from on-site spectators confirmed the view on the TV screen — things are looking good in Kansas City. Unofficial trainers’ reports reveal feedback from Kansas City football and baseball players who give top grades to their new “real grass” fields.

Does grass affect play? Will natural turf fields — old, new and revamped — still be cause for controversy? Sure they will.

On October 16, “Monday Night Football” commentators frequently mentioned the newly installed sod and longer-than-usual grass of Denver’s Mile High Stadium as the prime cause of any player’s slip or failure to make a “clean” cut for an up-field run. This continued throughout the game, even when replays clearly showed player error or the not-so-gentle nudge of an opponent as the reason for the missed play. While some divots of turf were torn out, this is a by-product of any highly competitive football game. There were no “chucks” of slipping sod, no loose patches within the field surface.

Perhaps some redemption was made in the hearts of sports turf managers nationwide when those same “Monday Night Football” commentators uttered this statement during the October 9 game between the San Diego Chargers and the Chiefs. They praised the Kansas City Double Stadium Sports Complex, talked about how good the facilities are, and then said, “And they went to grass, finally, thankfully, on both fields, to make it perfect.”

That’s an A for sure.

Steve and Suz Trusty are partners in Trusty & Associates, a consulting firm located in Council Bluffs, IA. Steve is assistant-chair of the public relations committee of the national Sports Turf Managers Association.
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NOTHING RUNS LIKE A DEERE®
Bunnell Tackles Each Field With Enthusiasm

By Bob Tracinski

The cities of sunny Southern California are oases of green nestled within a native desert. With moderate temperatures year-round, this region is a mecca for those who love the outdoors. Among the region's most energetic and enthusiastic supporters is Chris Bunnell, grounds supervisor for the Escondido Union School District, 25 miles north of San Diego.

Bunnell started with the school district in December 1989. He manages the grounds program for the district's 15 elementary and four middle schools, overseeing 230 acres of service area, including the hardscape and parking lots. Of all of the playground areas and athletic fields, 132 acres of that total area are turf. The school sites are scattered throughout the city. Nine of the schools are on a year-round schedule; the remainder are on the September through June schedule.

Population growth throughout California drives the continual need for more schools and more on-site green space for physical education and sports programs. Merely keeping up with the growth was daunting job in itself. Bunnell's job was to move the district's existing grounds program to a more professional level. Naturally, he tackled the challenge with enthusiasm.

Bunnell brought an extensive horticultural background to the job. Transplanted from Ohio to California at the age of eight, his early love of working in the family's yard and garden led to a part-time mowing business as a teenager. A high school class on landscape construction in the Regional Occupation Program gave him the opportunity to build a landscape plot on campus. Intrigued by the scientific side of the business, he earned an associate of science degree in landscape construction from San Diego Mesa Community College. He then took a grounds position at a private K-through-12 school.

Bunnell and Mimi (Danielle) married in 1979. They had already planned his return to college when, in 1981, he broke his back in a toboggan accident. Despite the injury, he started at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo in June and worked through eight straight quarters to earn his bachelor of science degree in ornamental horticulture in 1983. He graduated from college with a lifelong commitment to learning and becoming the best he could be.

He joined Environmental Care Inc. (a division of Environmental Industries) after graduation; next he acquired a management position with a lawn-care company. He then spent four years on the retail side with The Price Club.

Bunnell says, "I've always been a big sports fan. The school district position was the opportunity for a marriage of my two major interests — horticulture and sports."

The district has eight soccer game fields, 30 soccer practice fields, three baseball game fields and 42 baseball practice fields. Because he hadn't managed athletic fields before, Bunnell began his characteristic research for the best, up-to-date technical information on sports turf care. He mentioned his research to his Hunter Industries sales representative, Lynda Wightman. She suggested a resource he could contact—her husband, Steve Wightman, Stadium Turf Manager of San Diego's Jack Murphy Stadium and past president of the national Sports Turf Managers Association.

"I couldn't have made a better connection," says Bunnell. "Steve is a master of field care. He's a no-excuses kind of guy, always finding a way to get the job done. And, he willingly shares his technical expertise. He invited me to bring my crew for a behind the scenes tour and one-on-one question-and-answer session. Our relationship grew from there."

Safety is Priority

The first priority of the district's grounds care program is physical education. Bunnell stresses safety as the prime concern of the field-care program; playability is a close second. He says, "Our playgrounds and fields are outdoor classrooms, vital in shaping the physical and athletic development of the students. The fields also are used by the school's athletic programs and the community's youth and adult leagues. Soccer, our most popular sport, begins on August 1 and runs through mid-February. Baseball and softball begin in March. Football and track overlap with those schedules.

"There's always someone involved in pick-up games of soccer and softball, or playing on the playground equipment," he continues. "PE classes and some
sports events even take place during short breaks in the winter rainy season."
The school fields are the focus of the adult community. Adults not only assist
with and watch their youngsters' school and league athletic practices and games,
they participate in their own organized sports practices and games and in casual
recreation activities. Bunnell says, "It's not unusual to have 500 people on the
middle-school field."

Bunnell points out that no element of horticulture, including sports turf care,
is ever static. Conditions change from day to day, and sometimes, hour to hour. The
more turf is used, the more intense the maintenance program must be to com-
penstate for that use. With the heavy use schedule of the district's fields and no sea-
sonal downtime, it's tough to fit in main-
tenance procedures. In addition, Bunnell
schedules fertilizer and pesticide applica-
tions during periods when students are
off campus — on weekends, vacation
breaks or teacher in-service days.

"We even plan core aeration and
eliminate the plugs, either by moving over
them or dragging them back into the soil,
before the youngsters discover them," Bun-
nell says. "Those plugs become ammu-
nition for human target practice if we don't
break them down."

Sunny California isn't problem-free.
That green oasis is dependent on irri-
gation. Water is a high-cost, closely
monitored resource. Bunnell is a Certi-
fied Landscape Irrigation Auditor. (Cer-
tification is achieved through the Irriga-
tion Association.) Some of the school
sites were originally citrus or olive
groves or grape vineyards and have
decent soil. Other sites are essentially the
subsoil left from construction excavation.
Some sites hold water; others drink it.
Some fields have a combination of soils,
with areas of both water-holding and water-using characteristics.
The irrigation program must be con-
stantly adjusted to fit weather patterns
and turf needs.

**Water Conservation Practices**

During the drought of 1990, wise use
of water came to the forefront. Bunnell
worked with David Tiglio of HydroScape
Products Inc. to upgrade the district's
irrigation program. Bunnell says, "By
conducting audits, making necessary
replacements, and monitoring irrigation
efficiency even more closely, we saved around 40 million gallons of water
from previous historical patterns. Our
crew did an excellent job of monitoring
and providing the feedback to fine-tune
the system. It saved the district approxi-
nately $40,000 in 1990."

Bunnell serves on the city's reclaimed
water advisory board. Because the school
district will be an end-user for reclaimed
water, all new irrigation installations and
retrofits must be planned to accommo-
date it. Bunnell oversees the design and
installation of new irrigation as
schools are added to the district. Replac-
ung of outdated and inefficient por-
tions of the district's irrigation system
is an ongoing task. They have replaced
the entire irrigation systems on three cam-
puses and retrofitted the systems within
the field area on several others. He
praises his crews' skill in this area, too.
"We've had no problems with any of
the systems our crews have installed
or repaired."

continued on page 16
Profile continued from page 15

Since Bunnell joined the staff, three new schools have been added to the system and an elementary school was converted to a middle school, bringing more athletic fields on board. He works with the landscape architects and building contractors to eliminate as many ground-care problems as possible up-front.

No school district has unlimited funds. In Escondido, a year-round growing season and a growing population create greater needs. Bunnell must allocate equipment, supplies and crew time to make the best of available resources. The full-time grounds crew is 12 people, including Bunnell. One person handles the large-area mowing and two are irrigation specialists. There are two crew leaders who essentially split the district in half. One landscape maintenance crew member works with each crew leader. The other four people work on renovation, general maintenance and fill in where needed. The hiring of seasonal personnel is determined by the availability of funds.

Balancing a Daunting Maintenance Schedule

Bunnell credits the work ethic and dedication of the crew with much of the program's success. "Though there are definite assignments, this is a flexible group. Everyone is willing to put out the extra effort it takes to get the job done," he says. "Once we passed the stage of just putting out fires, I was able to implement some long-range planning. I buy most supplies for the year to take advantage of quantity pricing. I consider the 'transportability' of equipment that must be moved from site to site. I don't want a tractor on the public roads. Units that can be loaded onto or pulled behind a truck for on-road travel are safer and get to their destinations faster."

He adds, "Mowing is a continual task, with each site on a weekly schedule. Maintenance procedures are prioritized according to field use and the specific needs of each field. At times, because of limited time or funds, we may have to focus on the hot spots. For example, we might just aerate between the hash marks of a football field, or at the center circle and goal areas of a soccer field. Game fields get premium treatment to ensure the safest possible surface for the competitive athlete."

Bunnell plans two periods of downtime each season, during February and July, to repair areas damaged from overuse. These months coincide with the year-round schools' schedules. Football field renovation is planned for the Easter break. Soccer field renovation takes place in June, at the end of the traditional school year. The game fields are pulled out of play during these periods. Use is shifted to designated practice fields.

Renovation practices vary per field, but generally include dethatching by verticutting; aeration with core, shatter or slice aeration; topdressing with sand or quality soil; fertility adjustments based on soil test results; and pest control as necessary for weed, insect, or disease problems.

Bunnell follows IPM practices, citing both the environmental and cost-saving benefits. He holds a Qualified Applicator's License and an Agricultural Pest Control Advisor's License in the state of California.

Bunnell says, "Communication is essential with so many different groups using our facilities. The district's physical education instructors and coaches all understand the importance of good field conditions and are extremely supportive of our program. The outside user groups are cooperative, too. I've found most people are willing to accept and respect limitations, if they understand the reasons for them and if the results lead to better playing conditions."

Expanding Horizons

Bunnell seizes every opportunity to expand his horizons. For the past 11 or 12 years, he's observed the area's baseball spring training. He plays on the men's senior baseball league. "Competing on different fields gives me another perspective," he says. "As a player, you 'feel' the quality level on both a conscious and subconscious level. You're obviously aware of the surface and gauge your play accordingly."

He adds, "Last year, special arrangements were made to give our senior league teams the opportunity to play a triple header at 'The Murph' (Jack Murphy Stadium.) Being out on that field is an athlete's dream come true. It reinforced my understanding of Wightman's drive for perfection. Ideal field conditions allow players to concentrate solely on the game, elevating their performance levels one more notch."

Enthusiasm for sports runs in the family. Daughters Carmina (12) and Minette (10) participate in several sports programs. Carmina has already played soccer for seven years. Bunnell coached Minette's Little League hardball team last year, finding that a learning experience, too.

Along with the personal "mentoring," Wightman encouraged Bunnell to get involved with STMA. This put him in touch with other people in the area with similar turf management programs and solutions. Bunnell says, "It's the ideal forum for asking questions and bouncing around ideas. It's also instrumental in establishing a higher degree of professionalism throughout the industry. To earn the respect, and the dollars, that the industry should generate, we have to perform at that level," he explains. "STMA can help spread the message that the athletic field should at least be considered in the same light as a piece of equipment. But where a coach or athletic director wouldn't consider putting a player into the game with a broken bat, a flattened ball or shoes that were coming apart, field conditions are often ignored."

The STMA connection also led to lots of volunteer activity, because Bunnell's enthusiasm extends to everything he does. He got his feet wet at the national meeting in 1991, and helped host the Regional Institutes held at Jack Murphy Stadium in 1993 and at UCLA in 1994. He helped organize the Southern California Chapter, has been active in organizing and running numerous chapter events, and is the chapter's current president. He's also the co-chair of the 1996 national STMA Annual Meeting.

Besides giving back to the industry through his involvement with STMA, Bunnell has made presentations on sports turf at several regional turfgrass seminars. He'll begin teaching a course on golf course and sports turf management at Mira Costa College this spring. The evening classes and weekend labs are designed to assist others in raising the professionalism of their grounds care programs. With Bunnell as the instructor, they're sure to get a boost in their enthusiasm level as well.

Bob Trocinski is the manager of communications for the John Deere Company in Raleigh, NC, and public relations co-chair for the national Sports Turf Managers Association.
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Philip D. Saunders, President

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Wilmington, DE 19808
302/892-3030
800/892-9909
Fax: 302/892-3092
George Raymond

Agri-inject, Inc.
5500 E. Highway 34
P.O. Box 437
Yuma, CO 80809
712/864-3131
800/446-5338
Fax: 970/848-5338
Erik Tribelhorn

Agro-Tech 2000, Inc.
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Plainfield, NJ 08536
609/275-3995
800/270-8873
Fax: 609/275-3976
Peter van Drumpt, President

Air-o-Lator Corporation
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Kansas City, MO 64131
816/363-4642
800-821-3177
Fax: 816/363-2322
Douglas Cramer, President

Akzo Nobel Geosynthetics Co.
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Asheville, NC 28802
704/665-5030
Fax: 704/665-5006
P.L. Skoglund, Jr., General Manager

Alamo Group
1502 E. Walnut
P.O. Box 549
Seguin, TX 78155
210/739-1180
800/882-5762
Fax: 210/379-0864

American Heritage
16024 CTH X
Kiel, WI 53042
414/693-3121
800/693-3144
Fax: 414/693-3245
Jerry Goldberg, V.P. Sales & Marketing

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712/864-5131
Fax: 712/864-3393
John Senn, Director of Sales – Mega Haul Products

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Grass Valley, CA 95945
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800/994-0380
Fax: 916/273-0381
Mary Ann Townsend, Mktg. Manager

Automatic Rain Co.
P.O. Box 2067
Menlo Park, CA 94026-2067
415/233-5161
Fax: 408/323-4078
John Holmquist, Sales Manager

B

Badger Associates
1108 Third Ave.
New Brighton, PA 15066
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800/822-3437
Fax: 412/846-3470
Ray Badger, Owner

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Redondo, Ontario
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416/247-7875

Barenbrug USA
32080 Old Hwy. 34
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503/926-5801
800/547-4101
Fax: 503/926-9435
Tom Peters, Sales Manager

Beacon Ballfields
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Madison, WI 53744-5557
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Fax: 409/323-4078
Bill Minardi

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Fax: 701/282-9522
Ross Johnson

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Atlanta, GA 30350
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Fax: 770/992-8361
Bob Moran, Product Manager

Brillion Iron Works, Inc.
200 Park Ave.
Brillion, WI 54110
414/756-3720
Fax: 414/756-3409
Mike Irish