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Long before Hank Williams, Jr., sings out his season-opening Monday Night question, "Are You Ready for Some Football?" sports turf managers across the country lay the groundwork for a positive answer. Here's a look at five high school managers who exemplify the intensity and commitment that go into a year-round job.

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The Denver Broncos, and their fields, get prepared for the upcoming season. Photo courtesy: Steve and Suz Trusty.

STMA MESSAGE In the Public Eye



By Mike Schiller

ow, half of 1996 has sped by! I hope that spring and early summer weather

in your part of the country has been better than what we have experienced in the Chicagoland area. We suffered from a lack of moisture in the early spring, but we have more than made up for it in the past few weeks.

Many of our softball and baseball leagues are way behind due to rainouts. Though we all love a good challenge, I certainly wish us a little lesschallenging weather for the remainder

of the summer.

I got the chance to watch some television in early June, and saw golf pro Tom Watson win his first tournament in nine years. What a lesson in perseverance for us all. He's such a fine gentleman and a great striker of the ball. I was really happy to see him win again.

Speaking of winners, I also got to watch some of the NCAA College Baseball World Series games.

I was proud to observe the fine job that Jesse Cuevas and his staff have done at Rosenblatt Stadium. I've known Jesse for a few years — he's one of our former STMA board members. Jesse, my hat is off to you and your fine staff for the excellent facility you provided during the series and the rest of

the year.

With television coverage of the College World Series, the Olympics and the summer contingent of professional baseball and soccer games, our sports turf fields are definitely in the public eye. All your fields are "watched" just as closely - by the players, coaching staffs and fans - whether you're providing the playing surface for parks and recreation department sports, elementary, high school or college teams, or any step in the professional ranks. Your focus on safety first, then aesthetics, is what makes all this play possible - and what continues to earn the sports turf manager increased respect.

And — as long as we're focusing on fine facilities — maybe you have a

soccer, football, softball or baseball facility that you're especially proud of. Now is the time to put together some slides and photos and to document some of your hard work. Get those details down now and enter your field in the Field of the Year awards program. For more information, contact Steve Trusty at 800/323-3875.

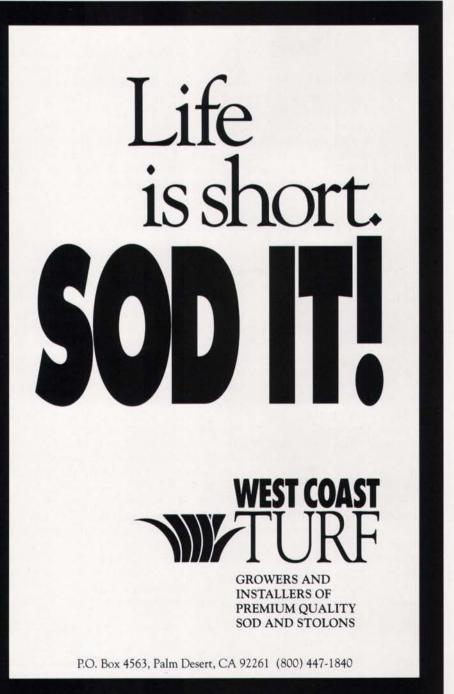
As each of you provide safe facilities for people of all ages and abilities, you *should* be proud of yourselves and the efforts you put forth.

Speaking of people to be proud of, I'm especially proud of our education committee. They've put together an excellent



program for our annual conference, January 15-19 in Colorado Springs. I really hope you're making plans *right now* to attend. You're sure to pick up at least one or two new or better ways of doing something that will make your job easier or more efficient and improve your fields.

Have a great summer!



THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE



Sommer's Seed Forecast

s word continues to filter from the fields of Oregon, producer of half the world's cool season grass, it becomes clearer that turf managers should consider buying fall supplies now. Particularly hard hit by a series of calamities this past year was perennial rye.

The popular overseeding grass suffered not only from flooding in Oregon's Willamette Valley, like many other species, but also from slug infestations and damage due to unusually effective, sometimes errant herbicides. As a result, individual farmers estimate loss-

es of perennial ryegrass ranging from three to 50 percent, adding up to an overall loss of about 20 percent.

Regarding perennial rye, a knowledgeable source in our area, Mike Sommer of Germain's Seeds, tells us, "Availabilities will be tight!" Besides the recent calamities, Sommer points out that "Increased usage has pressured the supply-and-demand axis. In the last three years, usage has risen from 131 million pounds in fiscal year 1991-92 to 174 million pounds in fiscal year 1994-95. Additional acreage has been planted to accommodate this growth, but there is very little to no carryover seed going into this fall."

The situation adds up, most industry sources agree, to higher prices this year for perennial rye. Some vaguely say "much higher," while others speculate about 15 percent higher.

Tall fescue prices also will probably rise this year. Flood damage from last winter, coupled with chronic short supplies of late, could drive tall fescue prices 25 percent above last year's.

Fine fescue seems less affected. Although losses occurred in some fields, most fine fescue is grown at elevations higher than the floods reached. If prices do not rise, limited supplies and high demand will at least keep prices for fine fescue strong.

For bentgrass, according to Mike Sommer, availabilities of proven varieties are adequate, and pricing should remain level. "New releases (such as the A and G Series from Penn State, Viper from ISI, and L Series from Lofts) will be available after harvest in limited quantities."

Common bermudagrass seems in good supply, and pricing has reached the lowest levels in years. Quality seed is limited, but quantity is there.

Sommer says, "Improved seed types (such as Mirage from ISI and Jackpot from Jacklin Seeds) are now available and performing well. New releases (such as Sultan and Princess from Seeds West) will be available in limited quantities after harvest."

For Kentucky bluegrass, supplies of elite varieties (such as Glade from Jacklin Seed, Midnight and Blacksburg from Turf Seed, and others) are limited at present, but a new crop is just around the corner. Generally, according to Sommer, "Availability and pricing should remain constant."

Sommer's overall forecast is that quality seed will be available at a premium; overall availability will be tight; and pricing will be at the highest levels in years due to demand far exceeding supply. In other words, he advises, "Contact your suppliers to make sure they have products reserved for you."

Ja-2: Ki

EVENTS

CAL FNDAR

July

The 1996 Lawnmower-Man 23 Open Golf Tournament. West Woods Golf Club, Arvada, CO. Contact: Colorado Sports Turf Managers Association's 24-Hour Hotline/FAX: (303) 438-9645 and leave a message, or call Troy Smith, Denver Broncos, at (303) 649-9000.

Training with the Bears, a 24tour of the professional football team's new state-of-the-art training facility. Chicago Bears Training Facility, Lake Forest, IL. Contact: Midwest Sports Turf Managers Association, (847) 439-4727.

Turfgrass Producers Inter-25-27national Summer Convention and Field Days. Hyatt Regency, Sacramento, CA. Contact: Tom Ford, TPI, (800) 405-TURF or (708) 705-9898.

OPE Technicians Certification 28 - 29testing (8 a.m., 11 a.m., and 2 p.m). EXPO, Louisville, KY. Contact: OPE Technicians Certification, (512) 442-1788, fax (512) 442-1789.

International Lawn, Garden 28-30 and Power Equipment EXPO. Louisville, KY. Contact: (703) 549-7600.

July-August

PGMS/MAPA Summer 31 - 1Grounds Maintenance Conference, Will Rainey Harper College, Palatine, IL. Contact: Robert Getz, (708) 925-6350, fax (708) 925-6035.

Penn State Turfgrass Field 7-8 Days. Joseph Valentine Turfgrass Research Center and Landscape Management Research Center, Penn State Univ., University Park, PA. Contact: PA Turfgrass Council, (814) 863-3475, fax (814) 863-3475 or George Hamilton, Dept. of Agronomy, (814) 865-3007.

Send announcements of your events two months in advance to: Editor, sportsTURF, 68-860 Perez Road, Suite J, Cathedral City, CA 92234. Fax: (619) 770-8019.



Chandler Arizona Parks Department Chandler, Arizona





handler Arizona has selected Primavera bermudagrass for all fifteen of the new soccer fields that have been seeded in the last eighteen months. In addition, they are using Primavera on all the city parks and grounds.

According to Kris Kirsher, maintenance coordinator, they have used common bermudagrass before but had problems with allergic reactions among the players. Then they tried Mid-iron bermudagrass but is was very susceptible to bermudagrass scale. The third variety they tested was Primavera. Kris was really impressed with its quick germination and establishment. It stayed greener longer in the fall and greened-up earlier in the spring than any of the other seeded types they tested. Primavera also was resistant to bermudagrass scale, so their problems were solved.

Kris and his crew of four were able to convert old cattle corrals, to excellent quality soccer fields. The San Tan Soccer Association plays on the fields nine months out of the year and with the use by other groups, there are soccer games almost every day of the week throughout the entire season. The quality of the playing surface is excellent throughout the year.



The number of injuries and loss of players have been greatly reduced with the dense turf that they are able to produce with Primavera. It has been stated by numerous authorities that Chandler has the best soccer fields in the Phoenix area.

The work done by Kris and his crew is impressive, especially when one realizes that it was done on a minimum budget.

"Primavera is a high quality, lower cost alternative to the standard turf varieties sold only in sod or stolon forms." Kris Kirsher, Maintenance Coordinator



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This field, which was seeded in the spring, will be ready for competition the following year. Photo courtesy: Jim Puhalla.

Seeding Versus Sodding



The sodding project in the early spring will allow use of the field about two weeks later. Photo courtesy: Jim Puhalla.



Using big-roll sod, the turf manager can make mid-season repairs that would be impossible any other way. Photo courtesy: Thomas Bros. Grass.

By Jim Puhalla

hould we seed or sod our sports field? The accepted wisdom is that there are only two real factors in the decision: cost and how soon you need the field. But, like so much of the accepted wisdom, those two considerations only scratch the surface of the matter.

Let's take a look at some of the other considerations that lead to a wise decision about whether to seed or sod a field. And, while we're at it, let's review some of the installation steps that should be performed whichever establishment process you choose, and consider a couple of experimental options for dealing with

high-stress sports turf, as you would find on football practice fields.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Seeding. First, let's consider the advantages and disadvantages of seeding. The most obvious advantage is cost — the average cost of seeding an acre of turf with a good quality turfgrass is only about 25 percent to 35 percent of the cost of sod.

But there are also important advantages in terms of the varieties available to you. When you seed, you have the choice of selecting a low-maintenance turfgrass variety that will thrive on less fertilizer, less water and less-frequent mowing. In most areas, sod is just not widely grown in all the varieties you might want to consider.

The disadvantage, of course, is the longer time it takes to establish turfgrass by seeding. Ryegrass and fescues typically take four months before they're firmly enough established to withstand the mechanical stresses of sports competition. Common types of bermudagrass can be ready in four to six weeks when conditions are right, but bluegrass needs a full year to get in shape for competition.

Sodding. Now, for the advantages and disadvantages of sodding. The most obvious advantage of sod is that you can play on it two or three weeks after it's installed. Another advantage is that in warmer climates, the sod farms cultivate hybrid bermudagrass that you

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can't grow yourself from seed. Generally speaking, sod is very high quality turfgrass that performs well in use. What's more, you can make mid-season repairs using big-roll sod that would be impossible any other way.

The disadvantages of sodding start with the cost — as we said, about three to four times that of seeding. And because sod farms use very high quality varieties, sod usually takes more maintenance than seeded turf.

Turfgrass Selection

Seeding. For seeding baseball and softball fields in cooler climates, a 50/50 bluegrass/ryegrass mixture produces a good quality turf. And since ryegrass is not a heavy thatch producer, thatch management work is minimized. Choosing a less aggressive bluegrass variety will also help control thatch buildup.

On the other hand, football fields perform best with a higher percentage of a more aggressive bluegrass, which creates a heavier thatch layer. That thicker thatch layer protects the turf from the stresses of play, and cushions falls better than other varieties. And when it rains, the thicker thatch keeps players up out of the mud.

This is a central principle used by Vince Patterozzi and his staff in maintaining the turfgrass for the Baltimore Ravens NFL franchise. The thick thatch layer was one important reason that the team's fields in their former home, Cleveland, were able to support play in the most hostile weather conditions.

An additional advantage of bluegrass is that it gives the turf more recuperative power.

For lower maintenance fields, it's worth considering a 50/50 ryegrass/fescue mixture (especially with hard and chewings fescue). It's a fairly durable turf, but on a football field it needs frequent reseeding because it has less recuperative ability than bluegrass mixtures.

If you're seeding in transitional zones, tall fescue is a good choice, but it needs to be reseeded often, too, because it's not strong in the recuperation category.

As far as many turf managers are concerned, the best available sports turf is bermudagrass. Unfortunately for us northerners, it's a warm season grass. However, there are some cold tolerant varieties what will thrive as far north as Kentucky. Seeded varieties are considered "low maintenance" because they can be cut as high as 1.5 to two inches,



As an experiment, sod was installed in a 25-foot strip down the middle of this field. After a season of practices, despite the wear, the thatch layer was intact. Photo courtesy: Jim Puhalla.

which means less moving, irrigation, fertilization and pest control.

Sodding. For cool season baseball fields, the old standby 50/50 ryegrass/bluegrass is hard to beat — for all the reasons listed above. For football fields, 100 percent bluegrass gives you a thick, dense thatch layer to protect the turf and the players from each other.

In warmer climes, turf managers have access to the highest quality hybrid bermudagrass sod — and cold-tolerant sod varieties can be used up into the transitional zone, as well. These turfgrasses perform beautifully, but take lots of maintenance work - so keep your mower blades sharpened and your fertilizer handy.

Installation

Seeding. Cool season seed can be planted just about anytime the soil can be worked, but the best time of year seems to be late summer, from mid-August to mid-September. Warm season planting has a shorter window of opportunity, from late spring until early summer, or when the soil temperature reaches 65 degrees. For best results, rake the seed into the soil with a leaf rake, then lightly roll it for good seed/soil contact. Mulching will allow faster germination.

Sodding. Sod installation can be performed anytime the soil is workable. In the north, that usually means anytime from mid-April to mid-November. In warmer zones, it could take place whenever the temperatures aren't expected to dip much below freezing for a few days.

In laying sod, take care to keep the seams tight. One common mistake is to pull the sod into place in such a way that stretching takes place. Stretched sod will eventually shrink back to its original size, leaving troublesome gaps. A few days after laying sod, inspect the job for any gaps that appear (there will usually be a few, even with well installed sod) and fill the gaps with matching soil. Take pains to water new sod liberally for the first two weeks, because letting the sod dry out too much will also contribute to shrinkage.

Establishment

Seeding. Newly seeded turfgrass needs to be watered lightly and frequently to keep the top quarter-inch of the soil moist until the seed germinates. Once germination takes place, gradually reduce the frequency and increase the volume of water applied each time. Start mowing when you can observe the onethird rule, cutting off the top third of the plants.

In cool season areas, ryegrass and fescues take about four months to become firmly established, and it helps to apply one pound of nitrogen per month for the first four months. Bluegrass isn't firmly established for a full year, and it also needs monthly fertilization with one pound of nitrogen.

Warm season fields planted with bermudagrass can be used four to six weeks after seeding, as long as the turf is liberally irrigated. One-half pound of nitrogen per week makes a big difference if you want to use the field quickly.

Particularly for football, which places such extreme demands on the turf,

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Sod vs. Seed continued from page 9

waiting a full year before using the field allows the formation of a thick thatch layer. This holds true for both warm season and cool season grasses.

Sodding. A newly sodded field needs to be kept on the wet side for two weeks to allow the roots to catch, then taper off. You can start mowing as soon as the field will support tractor weight without rutting. With adequate irrigation and no more than moderate rainfall, you should be able to use the field in two to three weeks. One pound of nitrogen a month for four months helps get the sod solidly established.

Another Option

We have recently experimented with a combination of seeding and sodding on the football practice field at Ursuline High School in Youngstown, Ohio. We installed bluegrass sod on a 25-foot section down the middle of the field, where mechanical stress had worn through to the soil. The bare areas had



A heavy thatch layer usually means trouble for a turfgrass manager. But on a football field it can be an advantage, keeping players up out of the mud. Photo courtesy: Jim Puhalla.

been slit-seeded annually for years, and had always reverted to their "mud-bowl" character by season's end. So we installed bluegrass sod in the high-stress middle of the field.

At season's end, after more than 100 practices on the field, we found the thatch layer intact and keeping the

players up out of the mud. This spring, we found that the bluegrass was starting to come back from the sod, so we slit-seeded 100 percent bluegrass to support the existing turf.

It will take another year before we know whether this experiment was completely successful, but, so far, it looks like a good alternative for the middle of a practice field, or even a game field.

Taking account of the relative advantages and disadvantages of seeding and sodding will give you an opportunity to make an informed decision about the kind of competition you'll hold on your turfgrass and the amount of maintenance attention you'll be able to provide. With that kind of thoughtful decision, and careful adherence to sound cultural practices, you'll end up with a field that's a great competitive advantage to your teams. \square

Jim Puhalla is president of Sportscape International Inc. in Boardman, OH. He gratefully acknowledges the information on warm season turfgrass contributed by Dr. Michael Goatley, Jr., of Mississippi State University.

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