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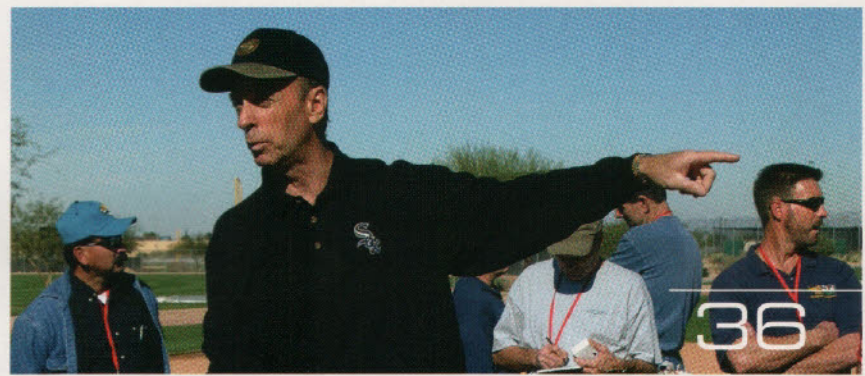
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COVER STORY

08 Baseball Field of the Year

Mike Sullenberger and his crew keep GMU's field in top condition despite a season-long marathon of use and the weather extremes of the transition zone.

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Here are some good ideas for getting a quick start on a field in spring or fast rebound coming out of the summer slump.
- 24 Keys to building a major league mound**
Turf manager Bill Butler says, "I've worked with some great coaches, and they've all told me: 'Keep it legal.'"
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ON THE COVER: Raymond H. "Hap" Spuhler Field, Fairfax, VA. Photo by David Brooks.

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Perceptions

I'm thinking about changing the name of this column. I inherited "The Front Office" and didn't think much about it. But after spending time with some of you at your real offices, the fields, and talking to other readers about the demands often made of them, I'm not sure I want to be associated with the folks in "the front office."

Now I don't want to paint with too wide a brush here because many of our readers may in fact be, or may perceive themselves as, members of their organization's "front office." This is about perception, though, and I've discerned that most turf manager types would just as soon be left alone by whoever's in the "front office."

Of course perception works both ways. No matter how professional you are, some front office types are assuming you're there to cut grass and that's it. They are wrong but don't know it. And so in contrast, check yourself. Do you treat anyone from your front office poorly? Do you assume contact with administration is going to be a pain? If so, try harder next time to have a good conversation and perhaps replace perceptions with reality, on both sides.

In the meantime, I'm changing the name of this column to "From the Sidelines!"

Speaking of perceptions, a mistake was brought to my attention and I want readers to know our policy. A 1-page story on the Super Bowl in the March issue was written by Toro's public relations staff. While this is not unusual, the fact that we didn't run, as we normally do, a sentence identifying the source or author of the piece was a mistake. Our policy is full disclosure so readers know where the information originated. My apologies for this oversight.

I saw where Giants Stadium in The Meadowlands is going to FieldTurf, the third NFL field to do so by my count. The new generation of surfaces is here and it is an issue that many readers may be faced with in the next few years, especially if budget cutting for states and municipalities continues. Please see Bob Campbell's opinion on the opposite page.

On page 30 in this issue we have the first installment in a series of turf manager profiles we're calling "Talkin' Turf with . . ." Our first victim, uh, subject is Steve LeGros from Hersheypark Stadium. We expect to share success stories, disasters, tips, and more from these pros. Please check it out.

In our February list of where to find hand-held power equipment, we inadvertently deleted what John Deere offers. Their Pro-Series lineup includes chain saws, line trimmers, blowers, hedge trimmers, and edgers. Other portable power equipment includes generators, multipurpose saws, and pumps. We regret the omission.



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Sports
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Managers Association



president's message

Facing challenges

"Until man can duplicate a blade of grass nature will laugh at his so-called scientific knowledge." Thomas Edison

Sports turf managers are used to challenges. We face them every day in one form or another. The trend of artificial turf field installations, including replacement of natural turf fields with artificial turf systems, has added yet another challenge for our profession. As sports turf professionals, we must be a source of facts when decisions are made about installing a specific type of turf. Installation decisions made today produce the playing surfaces that we will be managing tomorrow and for years to come.

Surveys show that a good natural grass field is still the overwhelming preference of players and fans alike. However, as we are aware, no grass surface will withstand unlimited use and still provide the desired playing conditions. As professionals, our goal is to provide the best playing surface possible for all levels of play, regardless of the surface involved.

We must look at these new systems not as a threat, but as another tool that can help us do our jobs better. The new turf systems are clearly superior to the old artificial turf. There exists a place for these surfaces, such as in an environment not conducive to natural grass or on fields that receive so much wear that it is impossible to adequately maintain a natural grass field.

Currently the marketing departments of installers and manufacturers are supplying most of the information on the new systems. Unfortunately, some field installation decisions are being based on this information with little or no input from the sports turf professional. I would encourage the companies marketing these artificial surfaces to recognize the professional turf managers at our facilities and accept us as the experts on our sites. STMs should expect to be a part of the decision-making process, and these companies can do a lot to further this ethical practice.

Much of the information about the new systems we hear today sounds very similar to that of the late 1960s and 1970s. Over time, we learned the strengths and weaknesses of those fields and that every option has both pros and cons. We have gone through the same learning process with sand-based natural grass fields. At this time we simply do not know how these new fields will perform and hold up over an extended period.

As an organization, STMA must assume a leadership role in gathering and disseminating information concerning artificial turf, just as we have with natural turf fields. We must take part in the discussions and learning process by providing facts and relevant research, by sharing our experiences with these surfaces, and by working with other turf-related associations to help compile the body of information on these surfaces. As sports turf managers, we must become aware of all of the issues related to all of the athletic field options so that we are adequately equipped to be involved in the decision-making process to

determine what type of field best fits our particular situations.

This process has begun. The SAFE Foundation has endorsed research on artificial turf systems currently being conducted by Dr. Andy McNitt at Penn State. UEFA has made available its artificial turf manual on their research results. I ask you, as professionals, to provide your input on this new generation.

Bottom line: To ignore this issue is to do so at our own peril.



BOB CAMPBELL, CSFM

Bob

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George Mason University's Raymond H. "Hap" Spuhler Field earns Field of the Year

BY SUZ TRUSTY

The Raymond H. "Hap" Spuhler Field of George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, earned the 2002 Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) Baseball Field of the Year Award in the College/University division. Michael W. Sullenberger, sports turf manager, and his crew keep the field in top condition despite a season-long marathon of field use and the weather extremes of the transition zone.

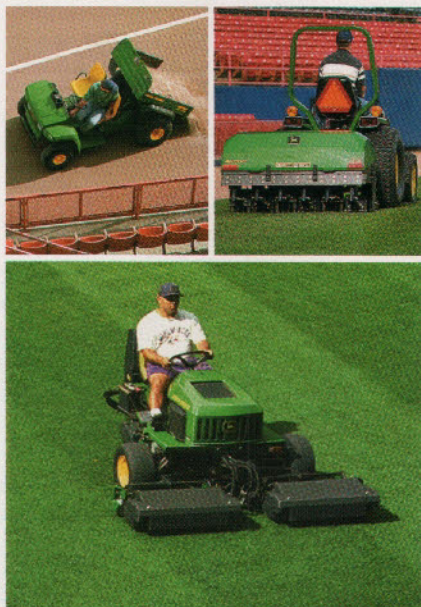
The baseball field, named in honor of the first head baseball coach at George Mason, is 16 years old. In that time the Patriots baseball team has had 15 winning seasons.

Field dimensions are 320 feet down each line, 375 feet to the power alleys, and 400 feet to center field. The grandstand seats 900 spectators and has an enclosed press box. The field is wired with a public address system and an electronic scoreboard. The field is not lighted. A full-size practice field is located just behind the first base dugout of Spuhler Field, providing an option to spread the wear and provide an outdoor practice site during poor weather worst conditions.

During the original construction of Spuhler Field, though soil specifications had been established, dirt from area landfills was used to convert the swamp-



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Field of the Year

land site to a more workable base for the native soil field. Over the years, some of the landfill debris has gradually worked toward the surface. Sullenberger says, "The field is irrigated by a 9 zone, in-ground system with 631 I-25 Hunter heads and Buckner valves, powered by an Aquaflo pump. When pulling irrigation lines we also have pulled up boulders of concrete from that landfill dirt. We've established a 2 percent grade to speed surface drainage and offset some of the drainage problems we've encountered due to the landfill situation.

"The field was established with bluegrass turf, and we'll continue with bluegrass through the 2003 spring season. We reworked the infield turf area in 2002. We stripped off the sod, aerated, hand raked, and mat dragged. We used visual sighting and ball roll tests for the leveling and then replaced the sod we had removed. This summer we are going to reconstruct the outfield, removing the debris, reworking the soil, and laser grading to a 1 percent grade."

Spuhler Field is the last athletic field on campus with bluegrass turf, and this will be replaced with bermudagrass during this reconstruction. Sullenberger says, "Bluegrass has a tough time standing up to the heat and



humidity of our summers combined with all the scheduled on-field activity. We used one of our intramural fields as a test for bermudagrass in 1998. We installed an irrigation system and sprigged the field with Turfcote bermudagrass. Once the turf was established, it held up to hot weather use much better than the bluegrass fields. We've now converted the eight other athletic fields to bermudagrass and some of the root systems extend 12-18 inches into the ground.

"The winter survival rate has been excellent. We always hope for a blanket of snow protection, though that blanket got way too heavy this past February. The first winter season, we cleared out a foot of snow to reveal green shoots

and virtually no winterkill. One season, plumbers working in the boiler rooms accidentally repressurized some irrigation lines on our Club Football field. Temperatures dropped and a valve broke, first flooding the end zone and then freezing over. Though we anticipated resodding, the turf came through just fine."

Always researching the options, Sullenberger will use TifSport bermudagrass on the baseball field to extend the active growing season a little later into the fall. The outfield will be sprigged; the infield and foul lines sodded. Any additional sprigs will be placed behind the left field fence to provide an on-site source of sod.

He says, "Dan Douglas, now with the Reading Phillies, started upgrading the athletic fields here. Jimmy Rodgers, CSFM, now with the University of Virginia, became sports turf manager in February 1996. I came in as his assistant that March. Up until then the turf an outside contractor had maintained areas and the baseball coaches did the daily infield preparation. We took over the athletic field maintenance, continuing with the contractor for the other areas of the campus. I had a good turf background when I came to GMU, but no baseball experience. Jimmy was my mentor on the dirt work."

Before joining George Mason University, Sullenberger worked for The Athletes Foot shoe stores. During the same period, he gained his experience with bluegrass turf through a part-time position with Chantilly Turf Farms, Inc. He graduated from James Madison University in 1986 with a Bachelors degree in Business Management and a minor in Sports Management. As a linebacker on the football team, he lettered all four years. That sports background gives him an athlete's feel for field conditions.

From January through November, Spuhler Field endures the play of baseball players of every age and ability. Sullenberger says, "The Patriots take the field for 28 regular season games and 100-plus practices. Weather permitting, January 14 is the first day of regular season practice, with games starting in February and continuing at least into mid-May.

"Patriot coaches host instructional camps at Spuhler Field, which begin around June 11 and run for 7 weeks in the grueling 90 degree heat of the summer months. The camps draw players from 5 to 18 and feature batting practice, infield and outfield drills and dozens of full-length games for the players who attend.

"In the summer of 2002, the Atlanta Braves, the Pittsburgh Pirates, the Colorado Rockies, and the Baltimore Orioles held free agent tryouts at the field," adds Sullenberger. "Players who participate in the tryouts are tested in all areas including pitching, hitting and fielding. And, because Georgetown University has no field for practice, they've used Spuhler Field as their practice site for eight Sundays during both 2001 and 2002."

The baseball coaches also use Spuhler field to host two high school recruiting "showcase" events per year for college and pro scouts. Ten all-star high school teams are invited to play their best athletes in 25-30 games. The first is a 4-day showcase held over the Labor Day weekend. The Patriots fall season starts that next week. The second showcase takes place in November. Both of these events draw hundreds of spectators as well. Weather generally shuts down out-

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