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08



18



24



30

## COVER STORY

### 08 Professional Baseball Field of the Year

Tom Nielsen and his crew keep Louisville's Slugger Field thriving in the middle of the transition zone despite climate extremes and an average of more than 100 on-field events each year.

## Features

### 18 In & On the Ground

Tips from the trenches: We ask several turf managers, "What does your infield maintenance plan/schedule consist of?"

### 24 Super Bowl review

The 37th NFL extravaganza can't happen without the men and machines readying the playing surface.

### 30 Sportsturf Machines

Here's what pieces (and brands) of equipment and tools some of the nation's top turf managers feel are essential to their jobs, and why is each piece important.

### 42 Around the Grounds

The STMA issued Awards of special recognition during its 14th Annual Conference and Exhibition in San Antonio, including the prestigious Founders Awards.

## Departments

### 03 MVP's

### 06 Front Office

### 07 STMA President's Message

### 49 STMA in Action

### 50 Chapter news

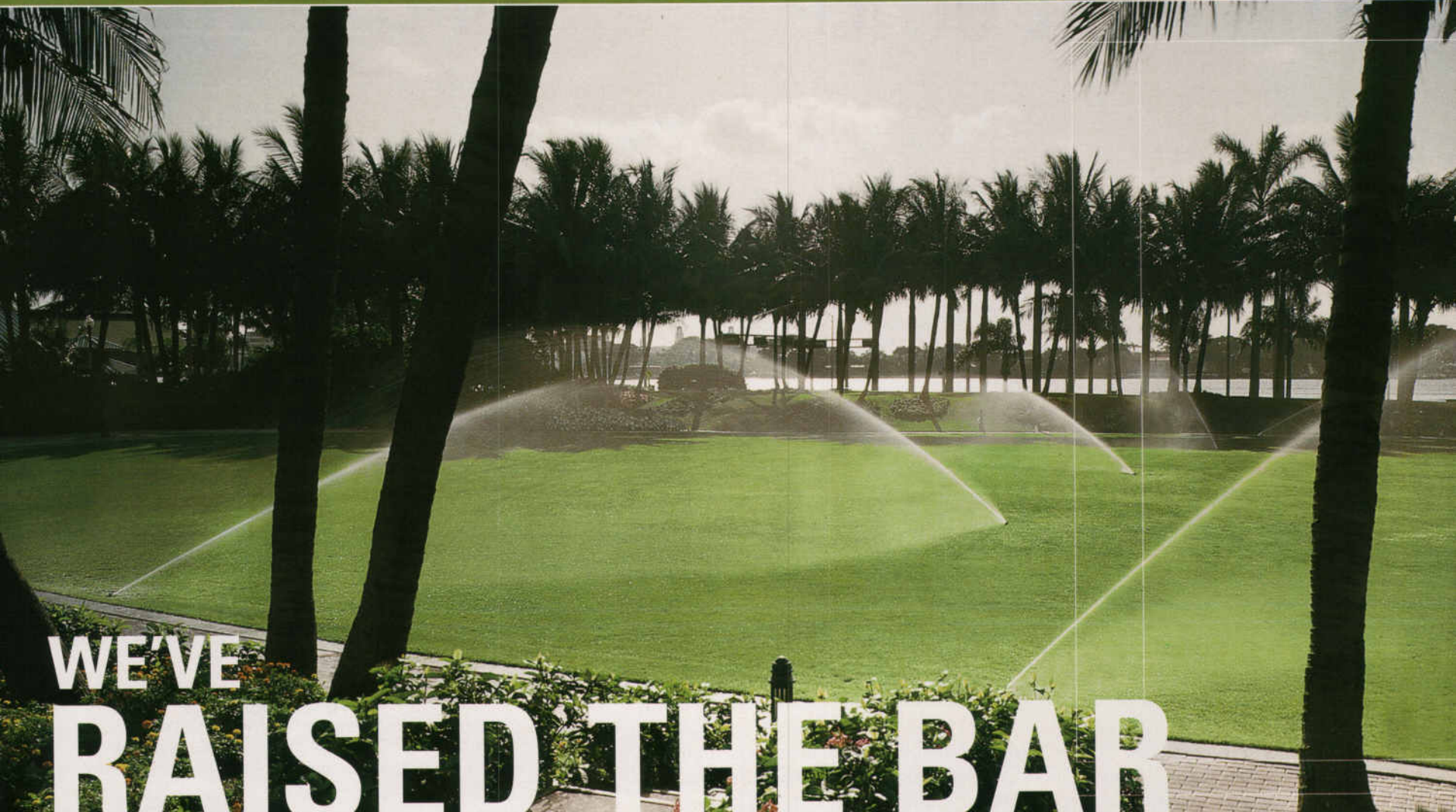
### 51 Marketplace

### 53 Classifieds

### 54 Q&A

**ON THE COVER:** Louisville's Slugger Field, home to AAA RiverBats.

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## That's one big baby!

All one needs to know about the dedication of turf managers was evident in a short elevator conversation between Ross Kurcab of the Denver Broncos and yours truly as we headed for the STMA Awards Banquet in San Antonio last January. Ross got on, we said hello and then I asked him, "Are you ready to go home yet?"

"Yes," he replied, "I miss my baby." Having a preschooler and a toddler at home myself, I asked, "Oh, do you have a new baby at home?" With one eyebrow slightly raised Ross responded, "No, I mean my field."

We talked for a few more moments about how Ross can keep tabs on things while he's away, via his computer, and then said so long as we encountered the pre-dinner throng. I wasn't surprised a bit later that night when the recipient of the prestigious Harry C. Gill Memorial Award was announced—Ross Kurcab.

And he's not alone in his passion, not only for his own turf but also for the profession in general from what I could tell in talking with folks at the Conference. I suppose if someone was just going through the motions as a turf manager he or she wouldn't bother attending such a gathering anyway but then again it would be quite a trick for any manager to just "phone in." I suspect that person soon would be in the unemployment line.

Speaking of employment, a young Single A groundskeeper was networking during the meeting, looking for another position. This person hadn't actually been let go but team management had issued an unpaid furlough during the winter months for budgetary reasons. This might seem reasonable but I was told the manager was still expected to hire staff, work with vendors, etc., to prepare for the upcoming season! Your honor, I present Exhibit A for lack of understanding of how valuable turf managers are to the overall success of an organization. Sheesh.

STMA Conference Wednesday afternoons feature "Jam Sessions," at which the different category members get together with their peers to discuss common issues. I bounced around these sessions to listen (all of the rooms were, uh, "jammed"). After I had been in the Category I session awhile it dawned on me that this was the Big Time, that the guys and gals in this room were the ones responsible for the fields I see on television all the time. Maybe I'm goofy but I got a big kick out of hanging out with this group of VIPs.

During all the sessions, workshops, and roundtables I attended, one universal theme seemed to come up time after time and that is communication. No matter what level you are at in your career now, you need to keep communication lines open with not only your boss but perhaps his or her boss, your crew, parents, your commercial partners and vendors, and the media when necessary. If you develop good relationships with the key individuals who can help you produce the best fields consistently, the athletes will benefit and so will your career.

Think Spring!



**Comments always welcome.**  
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# president's message

## An honor and a responsibility

This is my first column as President of the Sports Turf Managers Association. I'm humbled by the honor of serving as the representative of an association filled with individuals so dedicated to the profession. I've just returned from our 14th Annual Conference in San Antonio where I had the opportunity to meet many of you for the first time and to reconnect with others I've grown to know over the years. Once again, I'm impressed with the willingness of individuals to share their knowledge and expertise and to openly discuss what they've learned through their failures as well as their successes. The networking that takes part within this group of professionals is the greatest asset of our association.

Special thanks go to all those who contributed to the Conference. The members of the North and South Texas Chapters were willing and able hosts who provided that special touch of Texas hospitality along with all their assistance.

The presenters in the Major League Baseball Seminar did an excellent job. Thank you to Heather Nabozny and Gail DeGennaro of the Detroit Tigers; Leo Liebert and Tim Wilson of the Seattle Mariners; Eric Hansen and Larry Divito of the Los Angeles Dodgers; Charles Brunetti of the Boston Red Sox; and Luke Yoder of the Pittsburgh Pirates. Thanks also go to those who helped with the development of the Seminar, but were unable to take part due to job-related commitments. Special thanks go to Tom Burns of the Texas Rangers who handled the interim arrangements and Bob Christofferson of the Seattle Mariners who stepped up to the plate to coordinate the event both behind the scenes and onsite. Special thanks also go to site host, Tom McAfee of Nelson W. Wolff Municipal Stadium.

Serving as President is a responsibility that I take very seriously. I strongly feel it's important not only to give back to new members and young people starting off in this industry, but also to support the positive image of the sports turf manager as a professional in an important and worthwhile profession.

This past year was filled with challenges for sports turf managers with weather issues and field-use issues affecting field conditions even more than usual. Many of our members were the focus of negative media comments, often without any opportunity to discuss the conditions that led to a less than perfect field. Yet, as I watched the TV coverage on Super Bowl Sunday, it was apparent how far we've come as an industry in providing safe and playable fields. As sports turf managers have worked to improve field conditions, the expectations of field quality have also risen. And that's not a totally bad thing. High expectations combined with information on what it takes to produce and maintain high quality athletic fields, can give opportunities to provide the best possible fields for all levels of play.

Working together, we can meet the challenges of the future.

I want to see STMA continue to gain members because individuals see the value in what we're doing. Growing as fast as we are, there are bound to be some turbulent times. We need to work

through these, learn from them, and make wise choices to move forward for the good of the membership. I believe communication is very important. I want anyone to feel free to contact me or the other STMA board members at any time. I promise we will listen to you and take your opinions into consideration on any decisions made. You can reach me at [bcampbell@utk.edu](mailto:bcampbell@utk.edu)



BOB CAMPBELL, CSFM

*Bob*

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# Louisville's Slugger Field

earns 2002 Field of the Year

## Former train station site sits on Ohio River

BY SUZ TRUSTY

**S**lugger Field, the home of the Louisville Bats, in Louisville, KY, earned the 2002 Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) Baseball Field of the Year Award in the Professional division. Thomas R. Nielsen, Head Sports Turf Manager, and his crew keep a Bluegrass field thriving in the middle of the transition zone despite climate extremes and an average of more than 100 on-field events each year.

The 13,300 seat Louisville Slugger Field opened in early April 2000. Nielsen joined the organization in October 1999. He says, "The stadium was in the very beginning stages, at the concrete part of the construction. The old train station formerly at the site had been torn down and the front saved to incorporate into the completed design. The preliminary field specs had been developed, but the subgrade had not yet been set. Having the sports turf manager on site at this point, or even earlier, is a great advantage for all involved. I was able to make changes and additions without extensive change orders or construction-overrun costs. These have had a positive impact on the overall field maintenance program both by improving efficiency and cutting long-term expenses."

Nielsen's input ranged from the big picture to the small details. For example, the organization gave him the opportunity to select the type of infield clay, conditioner, and warning track material he wanted to fit the anticipated field conditions. He was able to add strategically placed storage bins for bulk materials and an area for an on-site sod farm. He also developed a detailed layout of the construction details, now plotted on a site map, and posted in the maintenance office where it is easily accessible to all staff members.

Because of the stadium's proximity to the Ohio River, much of the construction incorporates a floodwall. The tunnel that houses the entry gate for the field is actually a floodwall. There are 40 aluminum sections that attach to three bolts braced in the concrete to complete the seal if flooding is anticipated. Nielsen has assembled these sections, meticulously marking each one

for dry side or wet side and where it fits within the overall panel. With these detailed instructions, putting the panel in place correctly takes approximately an hour, and it will be watertight.

A geotextile layer separates the old subgrade from the new subgrade. Four- and six-inch drain tiles 20 feet on center run through the 6-inch gravel layer and connect into a central tile below the center field gate to the city sewer system. The central tile is equipped with flapper-style backflow valve to prevent sewage backup onto the field during a flooding situation.

Excess water within the stadium could then be pumped over the wall. The gravel layer is topped with 8 inches of a 90 percent sand and 10 percent peat mix.

The field was sodded a blend of three Kentucky bluegrass varieties—Ram, Georgetown and 1757—grown on the same sand/peat base. Sodding took place during the winter and in three stages within the period of a week to accommodate ongoing construction. Nielsen notes, “The sod laid in the first two stages was able to draw some moisture from the soil profile. Temperatures had dropped considerably before the last stage was installed. Because the irrigation system wasn’t yet in place, we called in the city fire department to irrigate later in the process when the turf’s need for moisture became critical.”

The current irrigation system consists of 34 Hunter I-20, 46 I-40 and 9 I-44 irrigation heads for a total of 89 heads in 13 zones, including the infield clay area. Nielsen says, “We added irrigation for the infield clay and the grass berm after the initial installation. The irrigation for the outside landscaping is operated with three separate control boxes. The field irrigation system can be controlled by a control panel or by remote control. I manually adjust irrigation run times based upon the daily use of a hand-held soil moisture sensor. In between irrigation cycles, I water by hand. There are eight quick couplers positioned around the field so the entire field can be watered with a 130-foot hose.

“We use the timer mainly for overnight irrigation. Generally, we’ll irrigate during the day and turn the system on with the remote to control moisture levels more precisely. I will use the irrigation system to water the clay when it can coincide with the regular turf irrigation. When the team is out, I’ll irrigate the clay

to the point of puddling, then monitor it as it dries down to keep the moisture where I want it. This saves valuable crew time. Hand watering takes up to 3 hours, while the system can do it in 15 minutes or less.”

Nielsen notes the construction process is always a learning curve. One element that takes cooperation is working out the details of when the sports turf manager has access to the field for maintenance without conflicting with the periods during which the construction companies involved are contracted for

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## Field of the Year

field care. He says, "We needed to negotiate for permission to work the clay areas and begin the mowing program to make sure we didn't alter the terms or reduce any liability or responsibility issues within the contracts. Communication between the construction contractors and me was vital. For example, when the concrete for the entry area of the stadium was poured, it required 10 to 12 days to cure. By that point, the field was basically in place. I needed to move the maintenance equipment inside the stadium walls and store it on the warning track during this period in order to keep up the maintenance program.

"By the April opening, the field work was completed. There were a couple areas in the stands that needed some work. Our maintenance office and garage area took another 3 months to complete. There had been a few areas of turf around the edges that had been affected by the lack of winter moisture and hadn't snapped back to the level of the rest of the field. I had overseeded them with perennial ryegrass earlier in the spring, the only time I've used any on the field. I'm still working at eliminating those patches. In retrospect, I'd have painted those spots green for our opener and babied the bluegrass back into top shape."

Once the season opened, dealing with the real world conditions kicked in.



Four of Nielsen's former assistants now have the top job at minor league fields. Mentoring is high on his list of priorities.

Louisville winter temperatures can drop to zero degrees, with either wet or dry conditions. Summer temperatures can hover in the high 90-degree range for weeks with humidity nearing the 100 percent mark.

A.J. Powell, Jr., Extension Turf Specialist for the University of Kentucky notes, "The most amazing part of the success of this field has been that I never thought it could be done at this location. In fact, I told Tom Nielsen that this location might be the most difficult place in the entire country to grow Kentucky bluegrass turf. The field is located behind a floodwall of the Ohio River, and in downtown Louisville. Temperature inversions, high humidity, and very stagnant air are most common at this location. Additionally, Kentucky bluegrass may be the most susceptible grass under these conditions to several devastating diseases. Obviously, Mr. Nielsen has expertly managed this field."

Nielsen has developed an aggressive maintenance program to make this happen, including a preventive approach to turf disease issues. Conditions are monitored several times each day. His log of product applications also includes any unusual temperatures

or other related weather conditions, how often the tarp is used, and any impacting field use situations.

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