

BY ADAM SIVITS

# "THE PAPER TURF ASSISTANT"



**A**s a sportswriter, I have learned an unwritten rule: Don't mention the turf unless it's really, really bad.

Last season National Football League beat writers and columnists from coast to coast criticized the playing surfaces in Pittsburgh, New Jersey, and Tennessee, among others. If I were writing about it, I probably would not have mentioned either that these fields are overused or have other factors that contributed to declined turf quality.

Of course, that would have been *before* I became a turf assistant at Invesco Field at Mile High in Denver.

It never hurts to know people. I was looking for writing work last August in my hometown, Denver, when my friend Andrew Hoiberg asked if I'd like to be a seasonal turf assistant for the Broncos. He recently had been hired as a full-time employee after taking care of Denver's training camp fields in Greeley. I told him that the only thing I knew about grass was that it grew and turned brown without enough water. He assured me that it would be OK.

My first day we painted the field for a preseason game. There were lots of strings and many, many buckets of paint. It's fascinating how easily an area of turf more than 7,000 square yards can be transformed into a beautiful playing surface. Don't get me wrong, it's not easy. It can take up to three full days, with a crew of eight or so painting, to get the media lines, sidelines, yard lines and hashes, endzones and any logos done. And it's amazingly simple, using just some string and metal stencils, or sliders.

Painting, however, was not all that I had to get my hands dirty. Over the next few months I learned about topdressing, seed germination, grow tarps, mowing patterns, soil temps, diseases, and the differences between grasses.

As an assistant, there's a lot of grunt work. The seasonal assistants empty the grass clippings from the Versa-Vac (which smelled like month-old compost), take down or put up the goal posts (boy, those crossbars are heavy), load up the Workmans with sand from outside the stadium or hand-rake the field and hand-fill the divots (which were relatively minor, thanks to the DD Grassmaster system) the day after a game. There's lots of sweeping and scrubbing.

Of course, those tasks paled in comparison to the tarps. In a late-August preseason game against Seattle, a monster thunderstorm decided to hunker down over the Denver metro area hours before kickoff. We scrambled sloppily to get the rain tarps out in time, and even then we had to call in reinforcements. We had cleaning crews, engineers and even cheerleaders helping us out. To keep the tarp from being blown all over by the swirling winds, we ended up putting the metal sideline benches on every conceivable corner and parking about a dozen vehicles in various spots. After the torrential downpour, we removed the weights, pushed the excess water off the tarps and rolled them up.

For a second, though, standing in the heart of a giant, round metal conductor, right smack-dab in the middle of two metal benches, in the midst of a potential tornado-causing thunderstorm didn't sound like the greatest way to spend an afternoon. In the end, however, the field looked and played fantastic.

Against the Colts in late November, another weather fiasco loomed overhead; only this time our crew had to deploy the snow tarps, which had actually only been rolled out in an August mock run. The snow tarps were considerably larger than the rain tarps and had seamless zipper ends, which made them extremely more difficult to fasten together, especially in near-freezing temps.

After a tremendous show of teamwork, the playing surface, and the larger pieces of the bench tarp that we had nailed down earlier, was covered. We arrived the next morning at 7 AM for that night's 6:30 PM kickoff, and at about 10 AM we began to plow the

tarps. By 2 PM the tarps were rolled up and the field was ready to go.

But the rough stuff was miniscule compared to the good times. For every time I had to crawl under the stands to make sure the heating plugs around the irrigation pumps were plugged in, there were ten times I got to hop on the Sidewinder mower or the John Deere tractor, or just throw the football around out on the field.

No matter how many paint buckets I had to scrub, it was all more than worth it to work the field goal nets in the north endzone and watch the games from the greatest seat in the house: the field.

Maybe I was spoiled, being such a novice and getting to work with Turf Manager Ross Kurcab, his assistant Abby McNeal, Hoiberg and their remarkable crew. I was just lucky.

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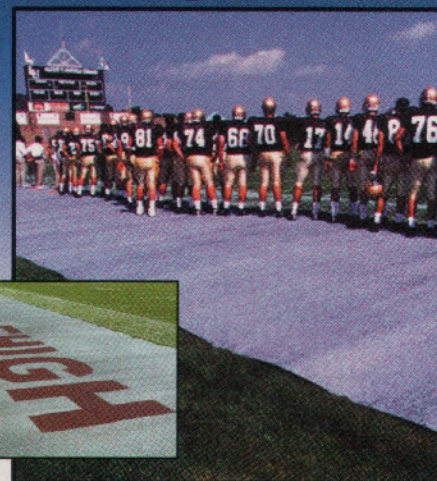
Adam Sivits is currently trying to grow a writing career in New York City. He can be reached at [adamsivits@yahoo.com](mailto:adamsivits@yahoo.com).

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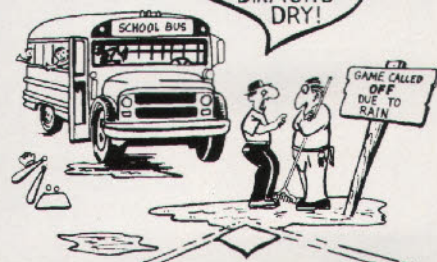
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Toro's recent introduction of the Power Max snowthrowers represents the industry's first major 2-stage snowthrower redesign in more than a decade. The most innovative feature on all Power Max snowthrowers is the Quick Stick Chute Control, which allows the operator to easily adjust the chute rotation and deflection angle with one simple control.

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The Toro Co./800-595-6841  
For information, circle 065 or  
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**SNOW THROWER**

The Ariens' ST1332DLE Sno-Thro is now available with taller chute that discharges snow up to 20 percent higher and further depending upon snow conditions. Additional features include a 120-volt automotive-style electric start, differential lock-out wheels for positive dual-wheel drive, and a heavy-duty cast-iron gear case.

Ariens Co./800-678-5443  
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John Deere/800-537-8233

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Husqvarna Forest & Garden Co./800-438-7297

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BY MIKE TRIGG, CSFM

# PRODUCE FIELDS N



**A**s with many park districts and recreation departments, summer baseball and softball programs are very popular with the public. For this reason, it is important that your playing facilities are in proper condition. At the Waukegan Park District, we believe that proper playing conditions and maintenance of fields are extremely important. But before the first player takes the field, getting the field into a safe, playable condition may require extensive work, and the unpredictability of spring weather might not allow sufficient time.

We all have nightmare problems from the spring and summer seasons. Perhaps it's that one infield that we constantly have to cancel after a rain because of inability to remove excess water; maybe worn turf areas, or perhaps soil build-up between skinned area and turf. Plan and prepare to correct these problems in the fall.

Our goal is to prepare the ball diamond for next year's use. Just as fall is prime time for turf cultural practices, so should be field renovations. Fall renovations are scheduled at season's end to repair worn turf areas, such as the front of the pitcher's mound. Our renovation procedure includes removing the worn area to re-sod, and also reduce the skin area back to its proper dimension. We use the same procedure for removing the "lip" build-up along an arc.

Some of our fall renovation projects have been extensive using an outside contractor to improve the surface drainage of the skinned area and reduce the skinned area back to proper field dimensions. The perimeter ball mix material is pushed to the center of the field to be reused. Topsoil is brought in, leveled and graded; then the skinned infield is graded with a center crown for proper surface drainage. The renovation is completed with big roll sod. Using in-house equipment and labor to assist the contractor, we saved several hundred dollars on the cost of the renovation. Also, reducing the skin area down to proper dimension reduces daily prep time. In addition, it is great hands-on experience for staff members, who now appreciate what it takes to reno-





# BETTER EXT SPRING

vate an infield.

Fall field renovations can simply be field edging, which gives you that crisp, clean, finished look. Edging also gives you a professional look, and, more importantly, provides good ball roll and playability. Late in the fall, as turf growth is slowed, we use a sidewalk edger to trim 2-3 inches along a base line or arc edge. After removal of the turf debris, we push back and compact the ball mix to the newly established edge. We complete edging by adding additional mix to provide a level surface between the grass and skinned area.

We are also diligent with herbicide applications for weed control on skinned areas. Backpack applications of Roundup herbicide, with a color dye indicator, control miscellaneous weeds that appear on skinned areas, fence lines, and warning tracks. This is particularly beneficial to ball diamonds that go out of play in August, with no scheduled use until the following spring.

Don't wait to communicate your field renovation project ideas. Prepare months in advance and communicate your intentions and expectations to coaches, athletic directors, and park and recreation staff. Develop a checklist of items with projected start and completion dates of field renovations or improvements you want to undertake. Communicate what the results will be when given the chance to do these fall field renovation projects.

In Waukegan, we conduct regular sports field inspections in order to prevent accidents. The inspections identify hazards that can be corrected before causing injuries to patrons or employees.

No matter what level of sports turf maintenance, the aim is to identify and correct hazardous conditions that may exist on your facilities. The goal is to reduce frequency and possible severity of player injury and unnecessary accidents through proper field inspection and maintenance.

On a playing field there are many hazardous conditions that can be easily identified because they are visible and obvious. However, there can be problem areas that are not so obvious, and often only detected

through an inspection process.

The following are items in our sports field inspection checklist that we conduct annually:

#### Maintenance of Skinned Area

- \* Inspection of infield composition.
- \* Leveling of worn area near bases/rubbers.
- \* Correct build-up between turf and skinned area.

#### Selection and Anchoring of Bases

- \* Base anchors correctly installed.
- \* Inspecting pitcher rubbers and home plates.

#### Maintenance of Fencing and Backstops

- \* Exposed concrete footings.
- \* Chain link fence properly secured.

#### Additional Safety Considerations

- \* Bleacher/player benches inspection and maintenance.
- \* Athletic field lighting inspection and maintenance.

Take the time to review those items on your sports field inspection checklist that can possibly be addressed this fall. Most importantly, document any repairs or work completed relating to safety hazards. Specifically, document all work done, when, and by whom, the problem identified, and actions taken to rectify or repair.

Take advantage of the fall months to prepare your fields for spring use. Coaches and players will want to begin practices as soon as spring weather permits. Next spring your efforts will be appreciated by many who will have fun, and will play safely because of the prior planning and prudent preparation you undertook in the fall.

**ST**

Mike Trigg, CSFM, from the Waukegan Park District, Waukegan, IL, is President-Elect of the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA).



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FFC Attachments, a Sweepster Co./800-747-2132

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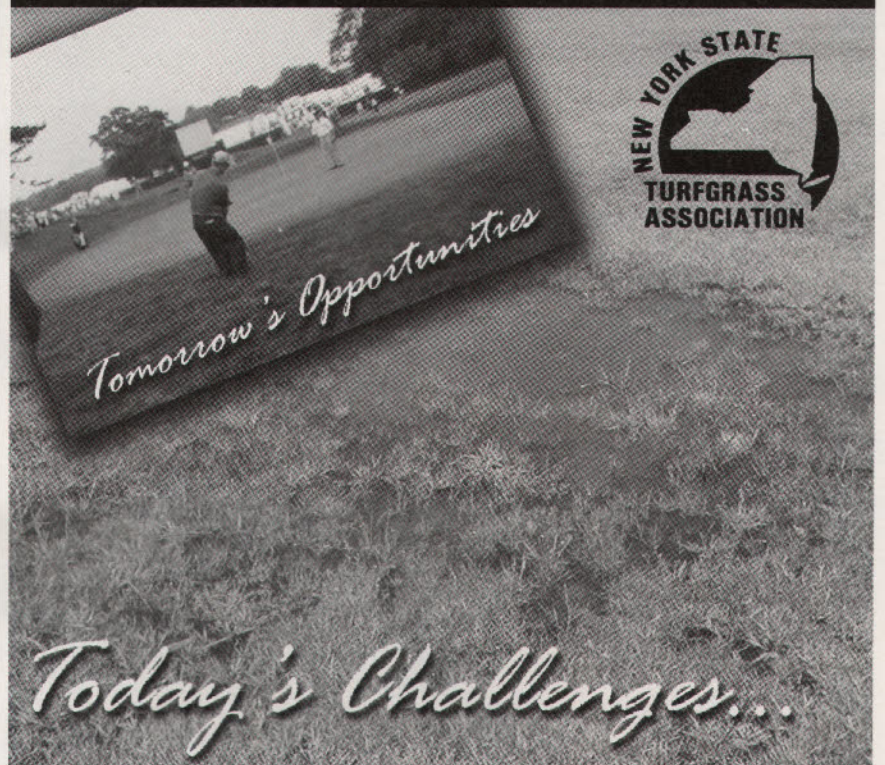
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