ball, softball, football, and then expand their program so they gain a broad level of experience. They'll be handling all aspects of maintenance and operating all of the equipment. We demonstrate how things should be done, have them work on it until they can demonstrate to us that they are competent, and then give them the responsibility to take on an assignment and complete it to our standards. All this has to fit around their class schedules, so they also learn how to set priorities and work as part of a team."

On field painting day, Prather will pull in three full time employees to assist, with the students rotating in and out from class to do all the trimming and assist with numbers, hashes, etc. He and Smith tackle all of the large area painting (end zones, borders, and middle emblem). Prather says, "We have a stencil man. Buddy Gentry, who owns a local sign shop, has been stringing out our end zones and laying out our middle emblem for over 30 years. The department hires him, but the dedication is all his. He's developed a set of stencils that can do nearly all the letters of the alphabet, just by turning them in different directions. In another long-term relationship, we rely on Tra DuBois and World Class Paint to supply whatever we need and they've always come through for us."

Solutions to past mistakes in field painting and to vandalism demonstrate the innovative attitude of the turf maintenance staff. A few years ago, the goal line "G" was accidentally painted at the 5-yard line of the north end zone on the Thursday before a game. To remedy this, Prather painted a "Dawg Paw" over this spot, thus masking a serious problem, and attracting much positive attention from the game day crowd. Several years earlier, vandals had used diesel fuel to write letters of the Greek alphabet near the mid-field logo. The turf staff quickly designed a logo to honor the memory of a recently deceased student athlete that also masked the damage caused by the vandalism.

Prather says, "One of the most important things we want our student staff to learn is how to set up a good management program and then understand how to adapt it to fit turf needs, weather conditions, and use scheduling. Being able to read a field, to look at it and adjust the program as we do with Scott Field, is the kind of education we want to give them."

Rick Cleveland, one of the state's leading sportswriters, in an article last year that focused on the conversion of natural turf athletic fields to synthetic turf at other facilities, wrote: "Mississippi State does not have any such plans, and if you could grow grass like State can, you wouldn't either. We can debate the merits of the respective football programs from here to doomsday. (Heck, Mississippians do that every day.) But, on this point, there is no debate: State grows grass better than the other two. It ain't even close. You want to go to college to learn how to grow grass, then go to State. Those folks can sure enough grow grass." ST

Annual Maintenance Program for MSU's Scott Field

January - February
Apply 1# N/1000 sq. ft (21-0-20 SRN) in late February

March - April
Preparation for spring football
Immediately following the spring game, spray with metsulfuron for ryegrass control.

May
Vertical mow in 3-4 directions, deep tine aerify
Apply l# N/1000 sq ft with 21-0-0
Apply l# K/1000 sq ft with 0-0-24 (14% Ca)
Apply 1000 lbs. 15-2-15 organic fertilizer to game field and surrounds

June
Deep tine aerify 2-3 times
Core aerify early June, drag in cores, blow off turf debris
Apply 1# N/1000 sq ft with 15-5-10 and 21-0-0, every 7-10 days
Apply 1# K/1000 sq. ft. with 0-0-24, (14% Ca)

July
Deep tine aerify 2-3 times
Apply 1# N/1000 sq. ft. with 15-5-10 and 21-0-0, every 7-10 days
Apply 1# K/1000 sq. ft. with 0-0-24, (14% Ca)

August
Roll field with 4-ton roller as needed (after scrimmages or games)
Apply 1# N/1000 sq. ft. with 21-0-20 SRN in mid-August
Apply 1# N/1000 sq. ft. with 15-5-10 and 21-0-0, every 10-14 days

September
Roll fields and repair divots immediately after games
Apply 1# N/1000 sq/ft. with 21-0-0 or 15-5-10 either after games or as needed
Apply 1000 lbs. 15-2-15 organic fertilizer to game field and surrounds

October - December
Roll fields and repair divots immediately after games
Vertical mow and sweep field in multiple directions before overseeding.
Overseed field: 20# of pure live seed/1000 sq/ft with Champion GQ Perennial Ryegrass. The initial application of ryegrass is made around Oct. 1 depending on the game schedule.
Apply 0.5# N/1000 sq/ft with 15-5-10 or 21-0-0 as needed.

Additional treatments as needed:
Three days prior to each game spray field with soluble Fe and S micronutrient package for a burst of color without shoot growth.
Make fungicide and insecticide applications as necessary following standard IPM practices. Primary insect pests of are fall armyworms and bermudagrass mites. The diseases which are most common are Pythium blight on the overseeded perennial ryegrass and leaf spot/melting out (incited by Drechslera sp. or Bipolaris sp.) on the bermudagrass.

Can you impact your soil microbiology?

BY **ROCH GAUSSOIN, PHD**

Turfgrass managers, especially sports turf managers, are inundated with products that are marketed to improve turf and increase stress tolerance. Often the claims of these products are based on testimonials from end-users or manufacturers marketing departments. Academic institutions across the US and internationally unfortunately do not have the resources to scientifically test the merits of all products available.

One group of products available are designed and marketed to enhance turf "health" of both the plant and the soil through the addition of beneficial microorganisms. In theory these products are applied and the beneficial microorganisms colonize the rootzone increasing the plants capacity to combat disease, take up nutrients and tolerate stresses like drought, heat etc. Until recently little scientific information was available which provided even a rudimentary understanding of turfgrass soil microbiology and the possibility of introducing microbes into the turfgrass environment to enhance turf health.

Work completed at numerous university turfgrass research programs has resulted in information that is helpful in determining the merits of microbial applications. This research has created new and academically interesting challenges for future research, fundamental questions have been answered and common perceptions been found to be untrue or at least, suspect. This article will attempt to summarize these studies and indicate implications relevant to sports turf operations.

Here are common perceptions about microbial relationships in turfgrass soils: Excessive pesticide applications adversely affect soil microbiology; sand-based rootzones are relatively sterile; soil inoculums/additives can alter soil microbiology; and turfgrass soils are lower in microbial biomass and diversity than other soils.

From 1996-1998, sand-based rootzones located on 16 golf courses in eastern Nebraska were sampled for microbial properties in a project funded by the USGA and the O.J. Noer Turfgrass research program. The courses were separated into three distinctly different management groups based on pesticide and fertility inputs. Rootzones ranged in age from 1-28 years. Results indicated that age of rootzone was the most significant factor in microbial biomass/diversity. Management level did not influence microbiology, indicating that higher levels of management, including relatively high pesticide inputs, did not adversely affect soil microbiology.

These findings are similar to data reported from Florida and New York. Microbial biomass of sand-based turfgrass soils 18-24 months after establishment was less than native undisturbed soils, but greater than traditional row crop soils. Similar results concerning microbial levels and stability were reported in work conducted in North Carolina. These data indicated that sand-based turfgrass rootzones reached significant microorganism levels and stability relatively quickly (within 12-18 months), and levels were equal to native soils.

They also reported the temporal effects of microbial populations, with the largest populations being associated with the periods of greatest plant growth, i.e., spring and fall, which also agrees with work conducted in Nebraska. It is interesting to note that the period associated with the lowest microbial numbers also coincides with the period of greatest root pathogen activity and other stresses, i.e., summer. Obviously, these other stresses such as heat and drought are contributing to the grass decline during the summer, but the soils microbial "health" should not be overlooked.

In a relatively short time, sand-based turfgrass rootzones reach microbial levels comparable to other "native" soils. This information can be used to develop a theoretical scenario for the use of microbial inoculants. These are products that are packaged and marketed to turfgrass managers to improve the microbiology of the soil. These are often beneficial organisms packaged with other ingredients such as iron or biostimulants, or in some cases packaged as spores of the desired microbe.

These products may contain up to 109 organisms per milliliter of product, and application rates range from 1 to 6 ounces per 1000 sq. ft. Soil contains 108 bacteria per gram of soil. The relative quantity of actinomycetes is approximately 100 times less than the bacteria and fungi 100 times less than the actinomycetes, but for our theoretical example, we will disregard both.

Realizing that many soil microorganisms are sensitive to UV light and/or heat instable, and survival from purchase to application is decreased when the packaged organisms are exposed to light and/or heat, assume that all applied microorganisms survive and that the maximum use rates of the product are applied - the ratio of applied vs. native bacteria is approximately 6000 native: 1 applied, or the applied represent 0.02 percent of the total bacterial population.

When one considers the total microbial population (i.e. actinimycetes and fungi), this ratio is even more unbalanced. The applied microbes are being introduced into a hostile environment at levels considerably lower than the indigenous microbial population. It appears that the applied microorganisms have little or no chance of effectively competing with the already established population. Further, work at Ohio State showed that at approximately 2 years post-construction in a soil/sand/compost vs. sand/peat rootzone, microbial diversity was not different, even though the former rootzone was significantly higher at establishment. While the compost increased microbial taxa initially, a natural equilibrium ultimately occurred in 1-3 years.

Research has shown the benefits of biological pest control products, where the goal is pest control as opposed to increasing microorganisms in the soil. Structured research is limited, but work is increasing. Since it appears that new sand-based rootzones take 1-2 years to reach equilibrium, the use of microbial-based products may have merit during establishment. Work in this area continues, and perhaps future research will shed more light on the use of microbial inoculants in turfgrass management. In summary:

* Relatively high pesticide applications do not appear to adversely affect soil microbiology.
* Sand-based greens are not sterile, but in fact, reach levels of native soils in a short time.
* Soil inoculums/additives may alter soil microbiology in the short term, but their use on established turfgrass soils is questionable. ST

Dr. Roch Gaussoin is an Extension Turfgrass Specialist and Professor, Department of Agronomy & Horticulture, University of Nebraska. He can be reached at rgaussoin1@unl.edu.

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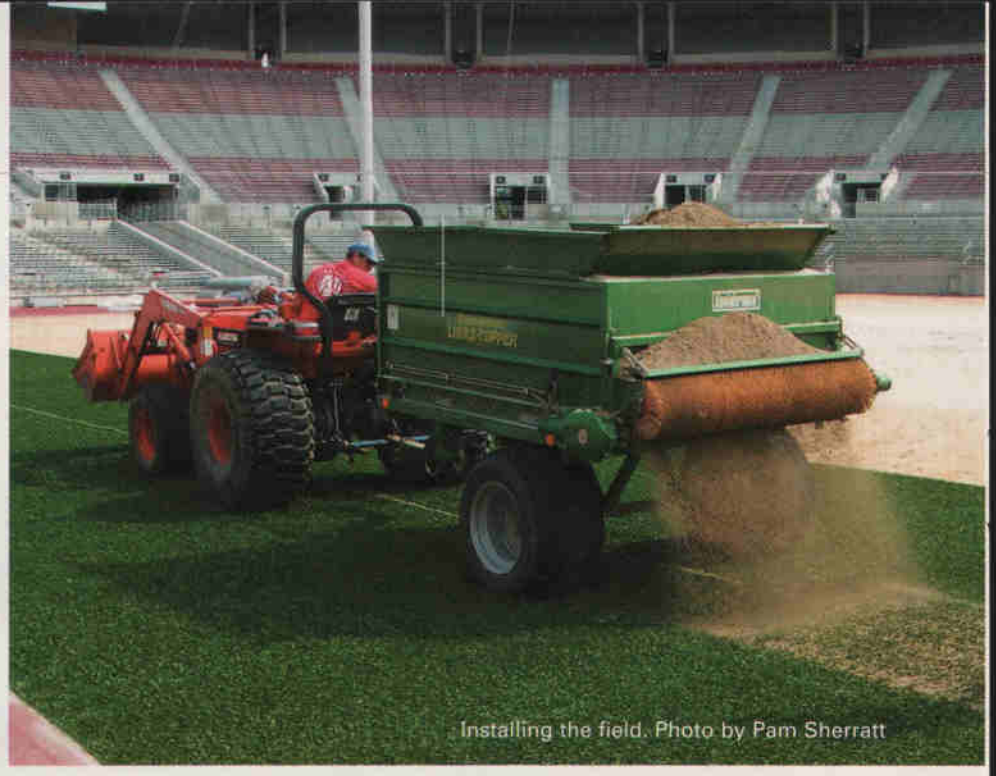
OSU's stabilized turf a Buckeye exclusive

BY **CHRIS HARRISON**


Installing the field. Photo by Pam Sherratt

Being nationally ranked in football is nothing new for the Ohio State Buckeyes. And the field they played on this year justifies national ranking, too. With a brain trust made up of Ohio State alums from the grounds superintendent to the sports turf researchers to the vendors, the Buckeyes got the best possible field they could find.

In summer 2003, Ohio State upgraded its field to a new Prescription Athletic Turf System and TS-II Synthetically Stabilized Turf. The new field is a mixture of perennial ryegrass grown through a synthetic grid and stabilized by a sand base.

"This has worked a lot better than we anticipated. The field has held up great," says Ohio State Athletic Grounds Superintendent Brian Gimbel.

The Buckeyes already were familiar with stabilized turf. For three years they had been using a stabilized Kentucky bluegrass field. "It was working well but there were a lot of challenges," Gimbel says. For one thing, they were watching plots put out by Dr. John Street and Pam Sherratt, extension sports turf specialists at Ohio State. The bluegrass was having problems that the ryegrass plots were not experiencing.

The question of whether or not to change turf was made by the fans after the Michigan game a year ago. Excited fans swarmed onto the field and pulled up great chunks of turf, right through the stabilizer. They tore through the thatch and the grass. Gimbel could understand their excitement; he earned his BS in agronomy at Ohio State 10 years ago and now is in charge of all Ohio State outdoor varsity sport facilities, including the field inside the Horseshoe.

The biggest change was the decision to install a seeded ryegrass field, instead of bluegrass. One of the prime concerns was keeping moisture off the surface.

"We grew the field in from seed," Gimbel continues. The ryegrass is a mixture of six cultivars from three breeding groups and suppliers. One of the turf's main features is high resistance to gray leaf spot and pythium.

On synthetically stabilized turf, fertilization, mowing, and irrigation are about the same as any other sand-based field, says Sherratt. She recommends careful monitoring of the fertility levels through soil and tissue testing etc. "Because we used perennial ryegrass this year, we did have a preventative fungicide program developed with our pathologist, Dr. Mike Boehm," she adds.

The three main management differences are verticutting (more verticutting to keep biomass accumulation down); tining (they have done none yet as they know from experience that it ruins the integrity of the stabilizer); and little-or-no topdressing, which would also create a biomass build up and move the stabilizer away from the surface.

Since they grew the field in from seed, they were able to lay the stabilizer in long, full strips. They run about 15 feet wide by 40 yards long. "We were able to lay enormous sections flat and then sow them together," Gimbel says. Then they put the sand on top.

Keeping organic material off the field is a prime concern of Gimbel's. During the season the crew mows every day at fifteen-sixteenths to one-inch height. In the off-season, they may mow every other day.

Topdressing strategy is another ticklish area. "I know one field manager who does topdress his field but plans to take all live matter off with the Koro and re-seed onto the stabilizer surface," Sherratt says. "That might be an option for us, but we literally play it week-to-week." In fact, Street and Sherratt meet once a week during the season with the stadium crew (Don Patko, superintendent of athletic facilities; Gimbel; and athletic grounds specialists Brian Blount and Brent Packer) to make plans for the week ahead.

The rye grows more quickly and is sturdier than the Kentucky bluegrass that used to cover the field. Joe Motz of The Motz Group, Cincinnati (www.themotzgroup.com), installed the new system. Keeping it in the family, Motz is also an Ohio State graduate, with a 1977 degree in Horticulture.

The old system, also installed by The Motz Group, was replaced with the TS-II product, a combination of real grass and a synthetic base to hold it in place. It combines sand-filled, fibrillated synthetic tufts and a backing of biodegradable fibers and plastic mesh. The unique matrix shelters the vegetative parts of the grass plant that are essential for vigorous growth and rapid recuperation.

"I personally feel that sand-based fields (those with over 90% sand) have to have some kind of synthetic reinforcement, whether it be Motz TS-II, GrassMaster, Loksand, or Fibresand, etc.," Sherratt says. She adds that these systems usually are too expensive for most high schools but should not be a problem for high-profile facilities.

A plastic grass field costs $800,000; if a stadium manager replaces the stabilized natural grass field every three years, that would still give 15 years for the same money.

Ohio State seeded the field during the first week of May and felt that it was playable several weeks after seeding date. "Note we used 100% perennial ryegrass," Sherratt says. "Establishing soil sod is a whole different ball game. If it rains a lot (like it did last year), then the imported sod layer remains saturated for long periods of time and it's difficult to core until is it drier and knitted down a bit."

Research shows that the amount of time it takes to root depends upon the turf thickness, with thicker cut sod, like that used in sports, taking a lot longer than washed or regular cut.

Gimbel was pleasantly surprised that the system required less overseeding than he expected. "I thought we'd be sending out tons of rye seed through the year," he says. "But the stabilizer held the crown of the plant intact."

In 2003, they had no serious divots all season long. There was some leaf tearing from cleats, but Gimbel points out that is exactly what they want to happen. The player's foot is released immediately and the leaf, not the whole plant, gives. "The crown shoots out a new leaf and the divots heal back quickly," Gimbel says.

Ohio State did overseed the field by the fourth game. "It was thinning a bit," Gimbel recalls. But overall, he is quite happy with the new field. ST

Chris Harrison, like everyone else involved in this article, is a graduate of The Ohio State University.

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Juggling user groups

BY **BOYD "ROB" MONTGOMERY, CSFM**

Growing grass and maintaining safe playable athletic fields are the easy parts of the turf managers' job. The headaches start when you have to interact with the many users of the facilities that you maintain. What it boils down to is that turf managers not only have to be experts in the field of growing and maintaining great facilities, but they also need to be partners in communication, organization, and sometimes mediation between the users of the facilities. Let's break down these three very important aspects.

Without communication between you and your user groups, nothing else will work. Communication is the single most important key to being successful at working with these users. Where do you start? First, you need to identify the important contact with each group. A face to face meeting is a must! Phone calls and emails are great assets to the entire process, but you need to meet with these key contacts face to face. The meeting needs to be informal and have clear set objectives on your end. Introduce yourself, your objectives, and find out how you can help them.

It's great to know that you need to put down X percent of nitrogen a year to grow healthy turf, but what you also should be interested in is finding out what the needs and goals are of the particular group. Sure you can talk turf and explain some of the fundamentals that may relate to some of their needs, but your goal should be to walk away with a clear outline of their needs.

The hardest part of this process is that after you have met with your groups you need to get a plan together that meets the needs of all the user groups. It is easy to get driven down the path of one particular group's needs, but if you're managing more than one group, you need to look at the BIG picture and how it affects the whole, not just the part.

Here are some examples of communications with user groups that I have found helpful.

1. Invite these key contacts to your board meetings. If their group will be affected by board decisions, they need to be involved. They may not have a vote, but they are allowed to give input to help with board decisions.

2. Many of these groups are run by volunteers or have key decision making positions that change often. Make sure that when change does occur within these groups that you are going through the process of meeting with them and discussing their goals and objectives. Just because you met with person A 2 years ago, doesn't mean that now, person B shares all those goals and objectives. Board change over frequently ushers in new direction and goals.

3. If you have many user groups, e.g., 3-4 soccer groups at one facility, you might want to consider forming an advisory group that meets to discuss pertinent issues. This is also a good way to also encourage good group communication.

4. Keep everyone in the loop. Just as you probably don't like surprises, these groups react similarly. If it be by phone, e-mail, or face to face meetings, keep them informed.

Of course if you are not an organized person, then you can communicate until your blue in the face and you will still fail. Many of these groups have guidelines and regulations that they are required to follow within their individual league structures. These need to be outlined in your meetings with your user group representatives. Generally, scheduling is the big issue with a lot of these groups as well as the facility or fields. Here is the issue: How do you allow enough time turf cultural practices but also allow the groups access to the fields when they want it? This is the $1 million question! Though this issue always seems to create bad blood on both sides, with effective organization and planning both sides can be satisfied. Here are some scenarios and solutions that I have found successful:

Scenario: With a multi-use facility, encompassing 135 acres, we have issues with groups starting games all at one time.

Problem: It creates traffic issues that would require a wait of 1/2 hour or better to get into the facility.

Solution: Organizing the start times with each of the groups so that they stagger every 1/2 hour.

Scenario: We have two travel leagues with three youth travel soccer groups. Adult travel group, adult recreational groups, and recreational youth all play on the 25 fields we provide for each season. More than one of the groups use the same field throughout the season. Previously, the groups were responsible for providing field assignments to the league individually.

Problem: Many of these groups were not communicating and scheduling multi games at the same time on fields. They were also over booking fields with play by scheduling two to three times as many games on one field then another.

Solution: I developed a scheduling grid that allots a certain number of game spaces to each league for scheduling games. This allows us to make sure that each field has a close even distribution of games. It also allows us to build in maintenance slots or rest fields when needed.

I throw this in just to mention that sometimes you run into situations where these groups do not have the greatest working relationship with each other. This allows you to step in and show these groups that you are a neutral party that is impartial and only there to make sure the needs of the groups, community, and facility is being met. I am sure many of you are saying, "This wasn't in my job description" but if you really think about it, how successful can you be if your groups are consistently fighting back and forth?

Much of what I have mentioned above has nothing to do with turf! In fact, you will find as you increase your success with juggling user groups you will increase your office workload. Successful juggling of user groups at any level takes a commitment from all parties to work together on all three of these aspects! It's not rocket science, but it is a necessity in order to survive, be professional, be successful, and keep your sanity. **ST**

Boyd Montgomery is Director/Facilities & Maintenance for Sylvania Recreation Corp., Sylvania, OH. He also is an STMA Board member as well as a member of our Editorial Advisory Board.