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# Going to the game

**Football is back** in the news. Those of you who manage football fields began preparing for this season long ago and soon the players, coaches, trainers, managers, headset handlers, et al., will be back for practice. And you'll be trying to maintain your turf best you can. We football fans appreciate everyone's contribution, even headset handlers' (especially if the home team wins).

Throughout the country traditions connected to football, from high school to the NFL, are socially important for millions of us. In our digitized and "reality TV" world, it's special to go to a game with your family or friends to see the local side play, especially if history or geography has made the opponent a main (read: hated) rival.

The time between games lends a dramatic air to football; fans usually have a week to digest the previous game and begin chewing the fat in earnest discussing the next. Anticipation builds and by kickoff, the talk is done and even casual fans are all on their feet, **READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL.** (Those Monday Night Football guys picked a winning catchphrase.)

Football games at all levels can be true American spectacles: the bands, the fanfare, the tailgating, the cheerleaders, the beautiful green fields (though that blue field in Boise is fingernails-on-chalkboard to this fan). Then there's the best part, the actual game! Autumn afternoons well spent. Good luck to everyone's home team this season.

More on SRI: I spoke recently to a veteran Certified Sports Field Manager who has experience building fields. He related that SRI, the maker of AstroTurf, NeXturf, and AstroPlay that is now in bankruptcy, had used road gravel in building bases for at least some of their fields. That type of gravel is designed NOT to percolate but to SHED water. In contrast, this CSFM says he uses gravel with the right particle size to GET 190 inches an hour in percolation.

While the "sports turf industry" understands there is a demand for these newer turf products, there still remains a vacuum of information, for example, how to maintain them. We will attempt to address that in our next issue; in the meantime, our CSFM contact says, "There's a Catch-22 with these surfaces; they were designed to withstand more activity but the more activity you put on them, the faster they wear out." Dr. Andy McNitt is conducting research into the life of some of the newer "carpets," but final results are still years away (we'll update on his findings so far next month as well).

Finally, following up last month's column on SRI's current status, a reader asked for the company's attorney representative's contact info. Here it is: Matthew W. Levin, Alston & Bird LLP, 1201 West Peachtree St., Atlanta, GA 30309, 404-881-7940 or mlevin@alston.com.



ERIC SCHRODER, EDITOR

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## The next big step

The Sports Turf Managers Association was formed in 1981 by a group of turf professionals who saw a need for an organization to meet the needs of the sports turf manager. The founding fathers of our organization were Harry Gill, Milwaukee County Stadium, Dr. William Daniel, Professor Emeritus, Purdue University, Dick Ericson, Minneapolis Metrodome, and George Toma, NFL.

It has been our long-standing vision that the association becomes strong enough to support its own executive director and staff. That time has arrived. With the help of Trusty & Associates and many dedicated volunteers who have freely given their time and expertise, we are now on the threshold of making this vision a reality.

### How did we get to this point?

In January 2004, I appointed a committee to evaluate management options available to our association. The committee members were Mike Trigg, CSFM, Waukegan Park District and president elect of STMA; Mike Andresen, CSFM, Iowa State University, and secretary of STMA; Boyd Montgomery, CSFM, Sylvania Recreation Corporation, and treasurer of STMA; Greg Petry, Waukegan Park District, former president of STMA; Bob Curry, Covermaster Inc., and past Commercial vice president of STMA; Chairman of the committee was Steve Wightman, Qualcomm Stadium, San Diego, and a former president of STMA.

After much deliberation and serious dialogue, the committee's recommendation to the Board was that it was time for STMA to pursue the possibility of hiring our own executive director and staff.

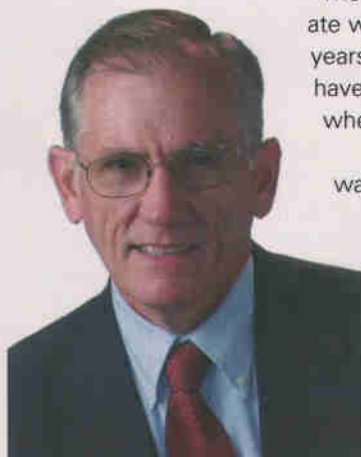
The search process is nearing its completion. The Board's goal is to select the new executive director at the July 16-18 Board meeting and for the person selected to start work September 1. Trusty & Associates have agreed to remain as the management firm of STMA through September and to work with the new executive director to ensure a smooth transition. We are all committed to continue providing services to all our members and continue our initiatives to help the association grow and provide support for our profession. Work is well underway for the planning of the 2005 conference in Phoenix, one that promises to be an event you don't want to miss.

The STMA Board must consider many options as we go through this transition. We are confident that we will be interviewing very strong and capable candidates, and look forward to hiring a strong leader and Association Executive Director, one that will open new doors and blaze new trails for us to travel. Of course, there is anxiety as we enter into this new phase of STMA management, but we have the opportunity to hire a professional full-time leader and staff. That is very exciting for a number of reasons.

Please trust that the Board will be looking for an individual who can embrace our active membership and help us all work cohesively to ensure STMA elevates to an even higher level of competence in representing our profession. The qualifications and resources of the incoming Executive Director will help determine the location of the STMA headquarters as well as determine the makeup of the new staff.

The Board or Committee did not take this change lightly. We all appreciate what the Trustys have done for this organization during the past few years. They have helped us work through some tough growing pains and have helped us get to the point in our development as an organization where it is time to take that next big step forward.

The board believes this is an investment in the future of STMA. We want you to understand this is the next logical natural step in building an Association you will be proud to be a member of.



BOB CAMPBELL, CSFM

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field of the year



# Scott Field of Mississippi State University Earns Football Field of the Year Honors

BY SUZ TRUSTY

**S**cott Field of Mississippi State University earned the Sports Turf Managers Association 2003 Football Field of the Year honors in the College/University division. The Scott Field site on the campus in Starkville, has been in continuous use for football since 1914. Since that time, the stadium has undergone numerous renovations and expansions. Lighting was installed in 1986. The most recent stadium expansion, completed in 2001, added an upper deck with skyboxes and 8,700 seats to the east side of the stadium, bringing the seating capacity to 55,500.

The field also has undergone many renovations. Bart Prather, MSU Sports Turf Manager, says, "The current field is a Prescription Athletic Turf (PAT) sand-based soil system that was installed in 1977. It was the second collegiate field in the country installed using this system, and was the first Bermudagrass field. This is a straight sand field, with no organic material added to the soil profile. The PAT system includes the standard extensive subsurface drainage system with a pump located approximately 30 yards beyond the north end zone. For the most part, the field is gravity-drained, but we can use the pump to pull water through the system to maintain a dry playing surface before and during heavy rain events. Though we generally pump only two to five times a year, it's an effective tool to have in our overall field management program.

"The sand-based PAT system is not continuous around the perimeter of the field. The soil profile is sand-based from sideline to sideline, and at installation (for reasons unknown), only one-half of each end zone was installed with sand. All the field surrounds are a heavy clay soil that is very subject to compaction and requires separate irrigation and fertility strategies. We use tarps to reduce turf damage on the side-

lines, but wear from foot traffic by cheerleading crews is always an aesthetic problem. The irrigation system is a Toro Monitor II hydraulic system with Toro 640 heads installed in the field at 48 foot spacing."

Prather inherited his "green thumb" as both his parents were raised on farms and the growing aspect just came naturally. His first sports turf experience came during his sophomore year of high school. As a player on the school's baseball team, he helped with field maintenance. At first he thought coaching would be his career path. He graduated from Meridian Community College and then spent a semester at the University of Southern Mississippi on a baseball scholarship before transferring to MSU for the sports turf program. After graduation, he became sports turf manager for War Memorial Stadium in Little Rock, where he oversaw a field conversion from a synthetic surface to natural turf. Next, he moved to the head spot at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, where he oversaw the conversion of that football field to natural turf. He accepted the MSU position five years ago.

So, when extensive renovation was necessary for Scott Field in 2002, it was easier for Prather and his staff. He says, "Laser leveling was used to return the crown to a zero percent grade. We want the water to infiltrate straight down and percolate through the sand profile rather than surface drain to the heavy clay surrounds. The field was fumigated to control soil-borne nematodes and any potential Bermudagrass contamination. Then the field was sprigged with MS-Choice Bermudagrass using custom row planting."

MS-Choice Bermudagrass is a unique tetraploid cultivar (often referred to in the turf industry as a "common" Bermudagrass) that was selected, developed, and patented by Mississippi State University. It is marketed nationally as Bulls-eye Bermudagrass.

"We initially selected this grass for its genetically dark green color and exception-

al canopy density," notes Prather. "It has more of a lateral growth habit than other bermudagrasses and it resists scalping during mowing in the early to mid-fall months. MSU had replaced our previous Tifway 419 bermudagrass turf with the MS-Choice before the 1996 season. We had been very impressed with the improved tolerance to wear, so we knew it was the turf we still wanted.

"We're just starting our third season with the new MS-Choice and it seems to be getting even better the more mature it gets. We've learned that it will initially appear a little leggy, more like common bermudagrass, as it comes out of dormancy, but will develop a dense canopy within three to four weeks into the growing season. The high density does make getting good seed to soil contact a challenge when we do our overseeding with perennial ryegrass. We drop the mowing height from 5/8-inch to 1/2-inch, verticut and sweep the field in multiple directions, and then put down the seed. We had tried a less aggressive program the first time we overseeded and the rye really struggled to take hold. Since so many of our games are televised, our goal is not only to provide the best possible bermudagrass base for playability, but also a pleasing appearance on the screen. We're far enough south that the transition back to bermudagrass is generally easier. We do speed the process by spraying out the perennial ryegrass with metsulfuron right after the spring football game."

Scott Field is dedicated to football. It hosts two weekend camps per year, usually in mid-June or late July. The Bulldogs' spring season runs from mid-March to mid-April. This puts six or more practices or scrimmages on the field plus the season wrap up Maroon and White game. Players report for the fall season and two-a-day practices around the first of August and will scrimmage on Scott Field at least three times during the second week of August. It will handle another three to six practices spread through the fall season. The Bulldogs play a six to eight game home schedule. In the recent past, the field has hosted university commencement exercises and selected high school football games at the request of university and athletic department officials.

"Weather is always a factor. By late May, we're into the mid-80s with humidity in the mid-80s. Our summer temperatures hit the hundred plus degree range occasionally and average in the low to mid-90s with humidity levels consistently in the high 90s. It can be tough on our crew and we start work by 7:00 AM to help work around it. The good

part is the bermudagrass thrives on it. We try to wait as late as possible to overseed each season because of the heat impact on the perennial ryegrass, but we must let the schedule dictate the timing. We do want the rye coverage once the Bermuda goes dormant. During the winter, our average low is in the upper-20 to low 30-degree range, though we can dip into the teens and single digits. Then we deal with

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## field of the year

early morning frost. With the new addition on the east side of the stadium, we have to wait a bit later to paint to allow the sun to hit the field."

Prather, and Assistant Sports Turf Manager Jason Smith, manage all of the MSU athletic fields working directly for the MSU Campus Landscape Department. The MSU Athletic Department contracts with the Campus Landscape Department on a yearly basis for the maintenance of the athletic fields. In addition to Scott Field, there are two grass football practice fields, a new generation synthetic turf practice field, the women's soccer and softball fields, Dudy Noble Field for MSU baseball, and the track and field facility. They also oversee the grounds in the northwest part of campus, which include those surrounding the Athletic Department and the Coliseum. Prather also has one full-time landscape turf individual on staff to care for these areas and help on the fields if needed.

All of the athletic fields double as the on-site training facility for MSU students that aspire to become sports turf managers. Under the supervision of Prather (MSU class of 1994) and Smith (MSU class of 2002), the daily management activities on MSU athletic fields are performed by students majoring in Golf and Sports Turf Management. This cooperative arrangement between the MSU Plant and Soil Sciences Department, the MSU Campus Landscape Department and the MSU Athletic Department demonstrates their strong commitment to student education while providing a superior level of training for the students.

Prather says, "Since Jason and I are both graduates of the program, we know what they're getting in the classroom and how we can best support that with actual field management experience. We work closely with those overseeing the program, previously Dr. Jeff Krans and Dr. Mike Goatley, and now Dr. Barry Stewart and Dr. Gregg Munshaw.

"While the hands-on athletic field experience is open to all students in the turf



program, we encourage those who know sports turf management is what they want to do to join our crew. We've found these are the ones who not only work hardest and do the best job for us, but who also ask the most questions and are most eager to take on every aspect of field care, so they gain the most from it. We, as an industry, need to reach out before the college program to get the attention of the next generation that this is a great way to combine a love of sports with a career in turf. We also need to find opportunities for high school level students to gain some equipment-based background. Unless they come from a farm, nursery or landscape background, many of the college students have no experience operating equipment other than a car or golf cart.

"We try to start the students in the areas they have the greatest interest in, base-

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