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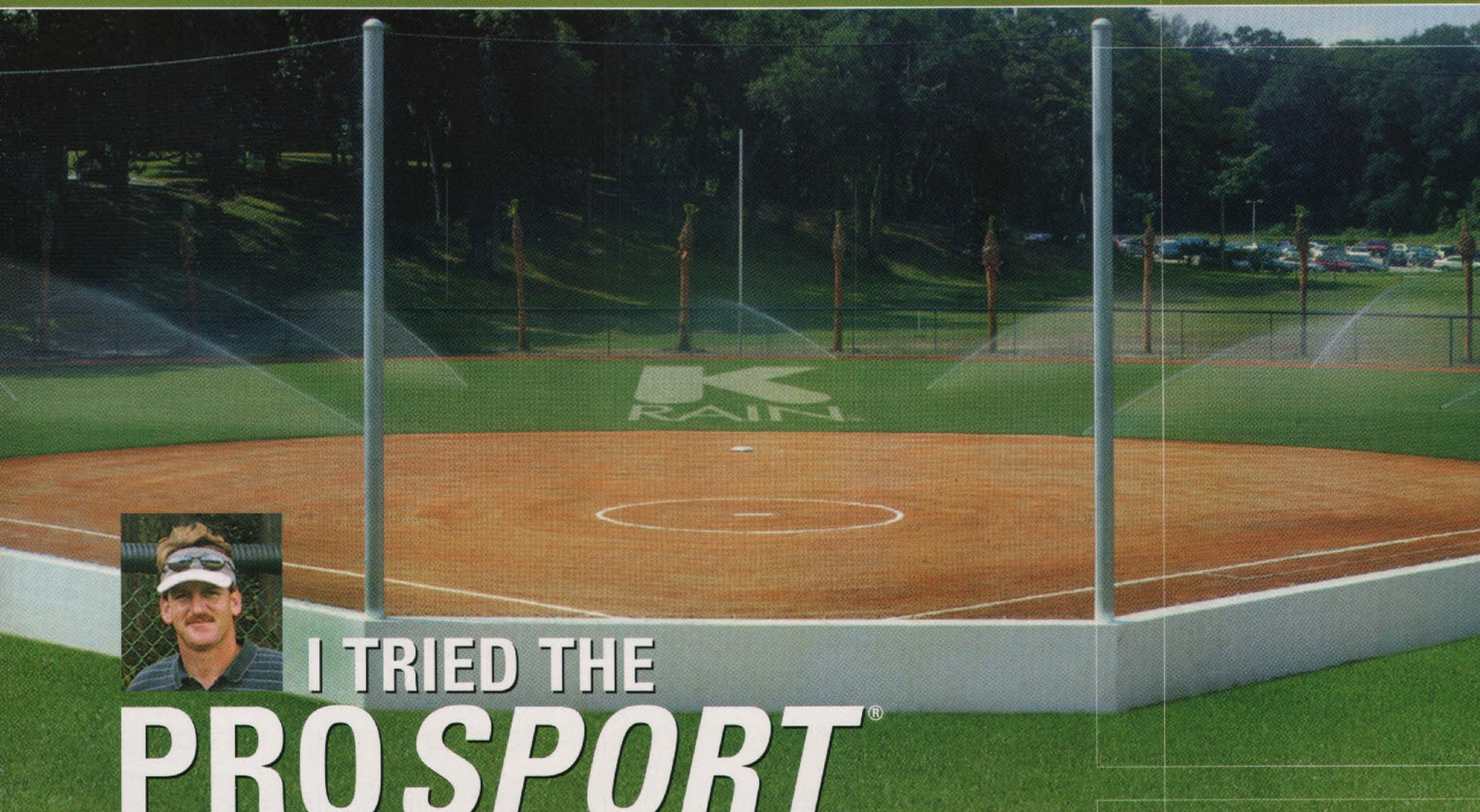
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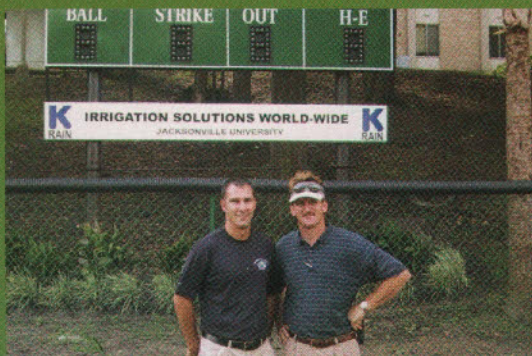


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Troy English - Jacksonville University Grounds Manager, Jacksonville, Florida

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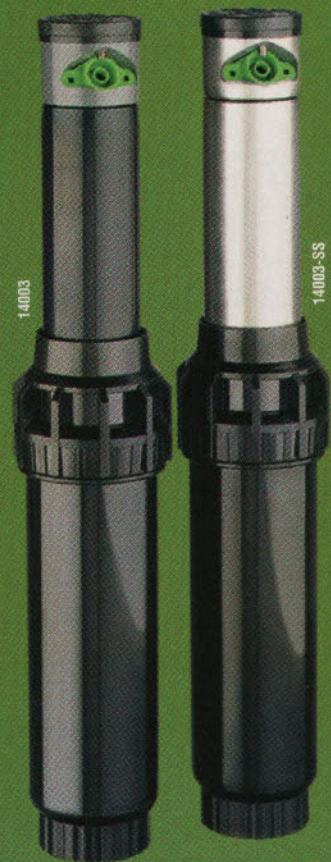


"The field looks awesome and plays great all the time!"  
Jeff Franquet, Jacksonville University Head Softball Coach (left)

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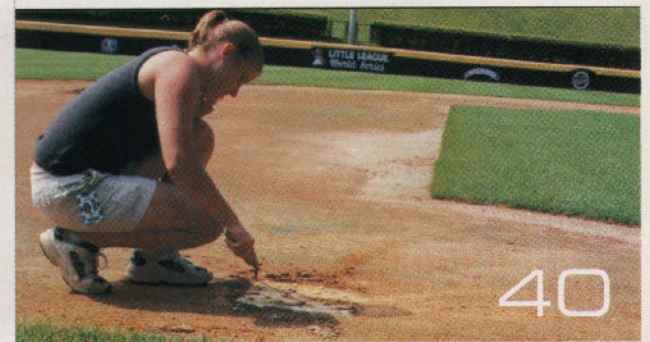
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# in this issue



# MAR.04

VOLUME 20 / NUMBER 03



## cover story

### Professional Baseball Field of the Year

**08** Top honors go to First American Bank Ballpark, located in Midland, TX, a 5,000-seat premium facility and home of the Midland RockHounds.

## features

### IN & ON THE GROUND

#### **14** Recognizing and treating drainage problems

If you have drainage problems, investigate your irrigation system and scheduling, and cultural practices.

#### **18** New PETCO Park primed for play

Luke Yoder is in a league of his own when it comes to readying a new baseball field for play. First Pittsburgh's PNC Park, now San Diego's new PETCO Park.

### SPORTSTURF MACHINES

#### **28** Top 10 commercial engine service points

Here are engine maintenance tips from a pro.

#### **38** 5 Steps to making better decisions

The more information and more choices you have, the more difficult decision-making can be.

### AROUND THE GROUNDS

#### **40** Need help? Volunteers *might* be the key

Often during the busiest times, we wish that there were a few more hands around to help with tasks that need done. Volunteers might be the answer.

#### **42** Wrigley Field strikes out the birds

Pigeons roosting on the upper deck trusses of Wrigley caused problems for fans seated below.

## departments

**06** From the Sidelines

**07** STMA President's Message

**49** SAFE Foundation Column

**50** STMA in Action

**53** STMA Chapter News

**54** Marketplace

**57** Used Equipment

**58** Q&A

**ON THE COVER:** First American Bank Ballpark, Midland, TX.

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from the sidelines

## My favorite two words: "Spring begins"

**After soaking up** some sun in San Diego at the STMA conference in late January, I returned to central Pennsylvania, and to Aristotle's four elements of depression: ice, snow, wind, and cold temps. (OK, I made that up.) Now I'm a four-season kinda guy but let's face it, winter is at the bottom of the list. While around here we can usually write off January and February for most outdoor activities, when March rolls around hopes for imminent warm days rise quicker than a Josh Beckett fastball.

So while I eagerly await March 20 ("Spring begins" it says on my calendar), many readers' "off-seasons" are long past. Baseball practice at many universities and colleges started in January, and games have been played for nearly a month already in the South. Here's to an early spring for the rest of us.

### Calling all volunteers

Thousands of volunteers also have begun their duties at ballparks across the country's warmer states. Without these folks we might not have any games at all, or at least not nearly as smooth-running stadium operations, at every level.

Jon Richardson, a former Triple A executive, now heads the Peoria (AZ) Diamond Club, a non-profit charitable organization that helps run the spring training facility shared by the Seattle Mariners and San Diego Padres. The wheels are greased for this arrangement by an Arizona statute that exempts teams from paying some amusement taxes if they employ charitable organizations.

"We find our volunteer base through advertisements, though we have a lot of people who come back every year," says Richardson. While local businesspeople run the board, the "worker bees" run the show, including handling parking lots, taking tickets, ushering, counting money, selling programs, working the speed pitch machine, and so on, says Richardson.

"We use 100-150 volunteers for 30 straight days since it's a shared facility," says Richardson, who has a total of 550 volunteers each spring. "We gave away \$20,000 last year in community grants to youth organizations, and we also save taxpayers money because city would otherwise be subsidizing these operations.

"Volunteers do it for camaraderie and friendships mostly," Richardson adds. "It's fun but it is hard work, especially in the parking lots."

Speaking of volunteers, I am proud to announce that this magazine now has an official Editorial Advisory Board. These industry leaders will help us bring you more useful articles from more turf industry experts. Welcome and thanks so much for volunteering to: Mike Andresen, CSFM, Iowa State; Chris Calcaterra, CSFM, Peoria, AZ; Jeff Fowler, Penn State; Boyd Montgomery, CSFM, Sylvania, OH; Pam Sherratt, Ohio State (winner of STMA's 2003 Dr. William Daniels Award); and Suz Trusty, STMA Communications Director.



ERIC SCHRODER, EDITOR

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## president's message

# Professional obligations and leadership

**It's that time** of year again. The days are getting warmer and the grass is turning green. Baseball is in the air. These days have a special feel to them and it's a great time to be in our profession.

Spring is the time of year we all feel young again and a time to look carefully at the challenges of the coming year with a fresh spirit and renewed enthusiasm.

We just completed our annual conference in San Diego. It gave us all the opportunity to get together with our professional colleagues and learn something new from their experiences. It gave us a good opportunity to share ideas and see how different people approach our common problems. It was also an opportunity to get together with old friends and meet new ones.

Our profession continues to face many challenges. The proliferation of new versions of artificial turf continues to be a concern for many, if not all, of us. As sports field professionals, we are the experts not only on natural grass fields, but need to be involved in the decision-making process when new fields are installed.

I continue to be amazed that these important decisions are made about playing surfaces without decision-makers having all the relevant facts at their disposal. That is where we come in.

Cost comparisons of artificial turf and natural turf have been casually tossed about and many times are taken as gospel. This is an area in which we need to take leadership. As far as I know, there have been no independent studies conducted that compare the costs of installation and maintenance of the two surfaces.

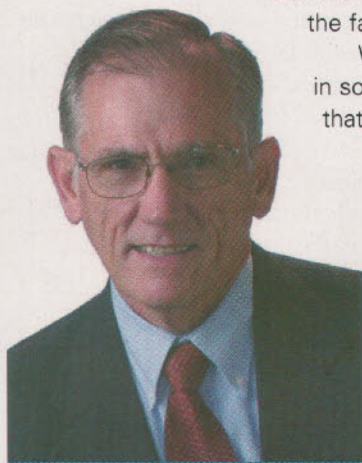
I reiterate: We are not merely grass cutters. We are sports field management professionals. The challenge for all of us in the Sports Turf Managers Association is to give the sports field manager the information each of us needs in order to be a participant in constructive dialogue about the fields on which athletes compete.

At our conference, Dr. A. J. Powell of the University of Kentucky challenged STMA to develop the true costs of the two surfaces and make these reports available to anyone who wants an unbiased opinion, one based upon fact, not speculation.

Within the next few months, you should see the results of our research.

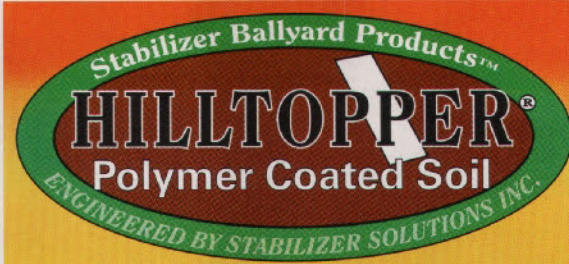
We are charged with the responsibility of making the fields on which athletes compete be the best they can be. We are the experts on the field as well as partners in the game. Our professional obligation and responsibility is to bring our expertise to the table and help decision-makers make choices in the best interest of the game, the players, and the fans.

While things are changing in sports (and seemingly not for the better in some cases), we must continue to take a leadership role in ensuring that playing fields reflect the best of our talents and abilities.



BOB CAMPBELL, CSFM

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# FIRST AMERICAN BANK BALLPARK FIRST IN PRO BASEBALL

BY SUZ TRUSTY

**T**op honors go to First American Bank Ballpark, the Sports Turf Managers Association 2003 Baseball Field of the Year in the Professional division. Located in Midland, TX, this 5,000-seat premium facility is home of the Midland RockHounds, Double A affiliate of the Oakland Athletics.

A bond issue, approved in 1999, called for development of the city-owned Scharbauer Sports Complex, including construction of its star attractions, separate baseball and football facilities. Grande Communications Stadium, the 15,000 seat, synthetic turf football facility, is just next door.

Construction of First American Bank Ballpark began in September 2001. Monty Sowell, head groundskeeper, arrived in Midland in October of 2001. He says, "The field was already in, and the irrigation and turf installed, when I came on board. The stadium was going up around it."

The soil profile is a 10-inch layer consisting of 95 percent sand and 5 percent organic peat. It tops a 4-inch layer of pea gravel over a network of drainage tile set in a herringbone pattern. The infield composition is 60 percent sand, 20 percent clay and 20 percent silt. The turf is TifSport Bermudagrass.

Sowell is a transplanted Texan. He says, "I had 3 years of golf course experience, working for Eric Becker at the Air Force Academy & PAFB courses in Colorado Springs. He was my first turf mentor, and I peppered him with questions the entire time I was there. I then spent a year at a minor league facility with Mark Leasure of the Sky Sox, another excellent mentor. When the Midland opportunity came up it was an easy choice. I loved ballfields and had a strong desire to be a head groundskeeper."

Sowell earned his BS Degree in Health and Physical Education from Arkansas Tech University in Russellville. All his turf experience was on cool-season grasses.

"So I arrived in Texas knowing no one, with limited resources, no budget history, and no equipment and our first game was scheduled for March 27, 2002," says Sowell with a laugh. "That's a perfect example of why networking is so important in this profession. Tom McAfee of the San Antonio Missions and Dennis Klein of the Round Rock Express have been excellent resources, always willing to share information.

"I found the hardest part about being successful here was finding quality goods and services. Midland is at least 300 miles away from any major supplier. We get our fertilizer and infield clay from Dallas and our sod from San Antonio, so timing of shipments and freight costs are major issues. The only purchases we are able to make locally are for field paint, irrigation supplies, and fuel.

"Our nearest service point for equipment also is 300 miles away. Loaners and/or demo equipment are out of the question. We are able to remain successful by proper upkeep of the equipment we own, equipment on trade from a local rental company, and help from Robert Campbell, the local golf course superintendent, and his service technician, Jack Nichols. Campbell has not only loaned us equipment, he's also a great resource for information. He's been growing grass in Midland for 15-plus years."

The initial irrigation system installation covered only the turf areas. Sowell and crew fought through the first season supplementing the system daily with hand watering and homemade irrigation stands spotted as needed to combat the continual drying winds.

He says, "Our biggest challenge is with the irrigation system and the wind. The wind blows here every day, predominantly from the southwest, but the direction isn't consistent enough to count on. The wind strength is so great, it's hard to describe. Our only cancelled game in 2003 was because of a dust storm. The wind was so strong and so filled with dust it stung your skin and clouded your eyes. You couldn't stand behind the plate and see the scoreboard."

Weather conditions can be brutal. In 2003, Midland went from February 20 to May 23, a total of 92 days, with no precipitation and the area's typical extremely low humidity. In the next 3 weeks, there were 6 inches of rain, followed by 1/2 of an inch in the final two months of the season. The end of season stretch also included a record of 9 consecutive 100-plus degree days.

Modifications to the irrigation system during the 2002 and 2003 seasons have resulted in a total of 22 sideline sprinklers, four heads on the infield, and 54 heads in the outfield area. "An efficient, ever-changing irrigation program is essential here due to our lack of rainfall and that wind. We've added some 360-degree rotation heads on the back of the infield and have been playing with watering the dirt with those," says Sowell. "It has helped us maintain our moisture content, but we still need to water the infield dirt 4-6 times a day. And we still need to do the hand