

“YOU DON’T WANT THE MOUND TOO BRITTLE OR ON THE OTHER HAND, SLIPPERY,” SAYS HEATHER. “YOU WANT YOUR CLEAT TO GO IN AND COME BACK OUT.”

University. Upon graduating from MSU in 1993 with a degree in Sports and Commercial Turf, Heather took her first major step toward making a name for herself and opening the door for other women interested in professional grounds keeping.

Heather credits many people with her success, including her MSU advisor, David Gilstrap, who helped her get her first professional job for the Toronto Blue Jays. She later became head groundskeeper for the West Michigan White Caps, where she had the opportunity to experiment with creative mowing patterns, some of which are highlighted in a book published by Boston Red Sox groundskeeper David Mellor.

In 1999, Frank Feneck, head groundskeeper for the Detroit Tigers announced his retirement, and Heather received a call to interview for the job. “It was an honor to be considered for the position,” said Heather. “I am follow-

ing in the footsteps of a great professional groundskeeper.”

Being the first female in a male dominated industry hasn’t intimidated Heather. “There is a great network of people I work with,” says Heather. “We are a close knit community and everyone helps everyone. I don’t feel treated any differently from my colleagues.”

During the season, Heather and her crew work an average of 65 hours a week. This leaves little time for personal recreation, especially since days begin at 9am and end close to midnight. “Preparation of the field at Comerica Park begins in March and sometimes doesn’t end until early December. This year was especially long considering the team played in the World Series,” says Heather.

Regular field maintenance includes mowing, painting the foul lines, and dragging the warning track. Heather uses Pro Mound in the pitcher’s mound and batter’s boxes and has



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Heather, second from left, and her crew at the 2005 All-Star Game.

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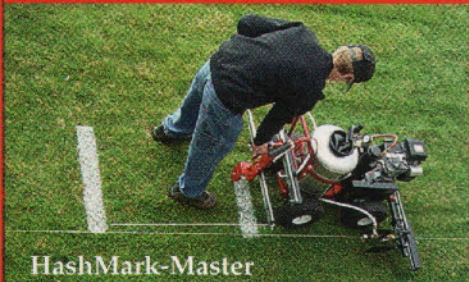


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developed her own special "toe test," to monitor the moisture in these areas. "You don't want the mound too brittle or on the other hand, slippery," says Heather. "You want your cleat to go in and come back out."

To keep on top of her game, Heather regularly consults with many of the industry's most celebrated experts. She is grateful to George Toma, NFL turf consultant and Ed Mangan, NFL Field Director, for mentoring her and allowing her the opportunity to serve as part of the grounds crew for the Super Bowl, which she has been participating in for several years.

Heather has also worked with Roger Bossard, head groundskeeper for the Chicago White Sox. Bossard led the reconstruction of the Detroit Tigers Comerica Park that was completed in 2000. While working on the field reconstruction with Heather, Roger stressed the importance of clay on the infield and offered maintenance tips for keeping the ground firm but soft.

"Roger taught me how to work the infield dirt and the importance of 'getting to know the skin,'" says Heather. "By hand dragging the nail and screen drags, you can feel the infield moisture, the texture of conditioner, and the thickness of the conditioner. That is one important tip that Roger passed on to me."

"Roger also is adamant about the importance of particle size in your soil conditioner. He uses Pro's Choice Pro Blend which I also use on my field," says Heather.

Just as others have mentored Heather, sharing and passing along knowledge is important in this business. "I've received a lot of support from my peers," says Heather. She, in turn, shares what she has learned with her grounds crew and numerous interns who come her way. "I have received lots of support and want to help others coming up in this industry."



"I HAVE RECEIVED LOTS OF SUPPORT AND WANT TO HELP OTHERS COMING UP IN THIS INDUSTRY."

While Heather holds the responsibility of overseeing all field maintenance at Comerica Park, she does not do it alone. She works with a four-member full-time seasonal grounds crew, her assistant Gail DeGennaro, Charles McGee, Ryan Silva, and Riley Paquet. Her team also includes two full-time seasonal interns, Noel Brusius and Matt Gerhardt. In addition to her full time staff, Heather works with an event staff of about 20.

The 2006 World Series was an exciting time for Heather, as this was her first World Series as head groundskeeper for a competing team. "We didn't do anything especially different to the field for the World Series," says Heather. "However, the weather during the games was quite rainy. The field had to be covered more often and monitored for moisture. We had a lot of Pro's Choice soil conditioner on hand."

"We topdressed the field prior to one of the games to control the moisture," says Heather. "Between games we made sure things were moist but not slippery, we really had to monitor this because of the rain."

"When we mow during the months of September and October, we collect our clippings



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because they take longer to decompose during the fall season. Removing them helps to prevent the slime layer that can add to slickness of the turf," said Heather.

Now that the 2006 baseball season is over and the cold has settled in, Heather is looking forward to once again participating in the Super Bowl as part of the grounds crew. She also can't wait to relax for a while and hit the slopes for a few weeks with friends. But as Heather reminds, grounds keeping is year round work. "Over the winter, I'll catch up on paperwork and work the Super Bowl in January." It's then back to work in March preparing for what she hopes is another winning season for her home team.

So, whether you consider Heather a Turf Goddess or not, one thing is undeniable, she has earned her place among the few distinguished Major League Baseball professional groundskeepers. Heather's commitment to excellence and professionalism in the industry can be witnessed every time you watch the Detroit Tigers play a home game, and for Heather there is nothing better than doing what she loves.

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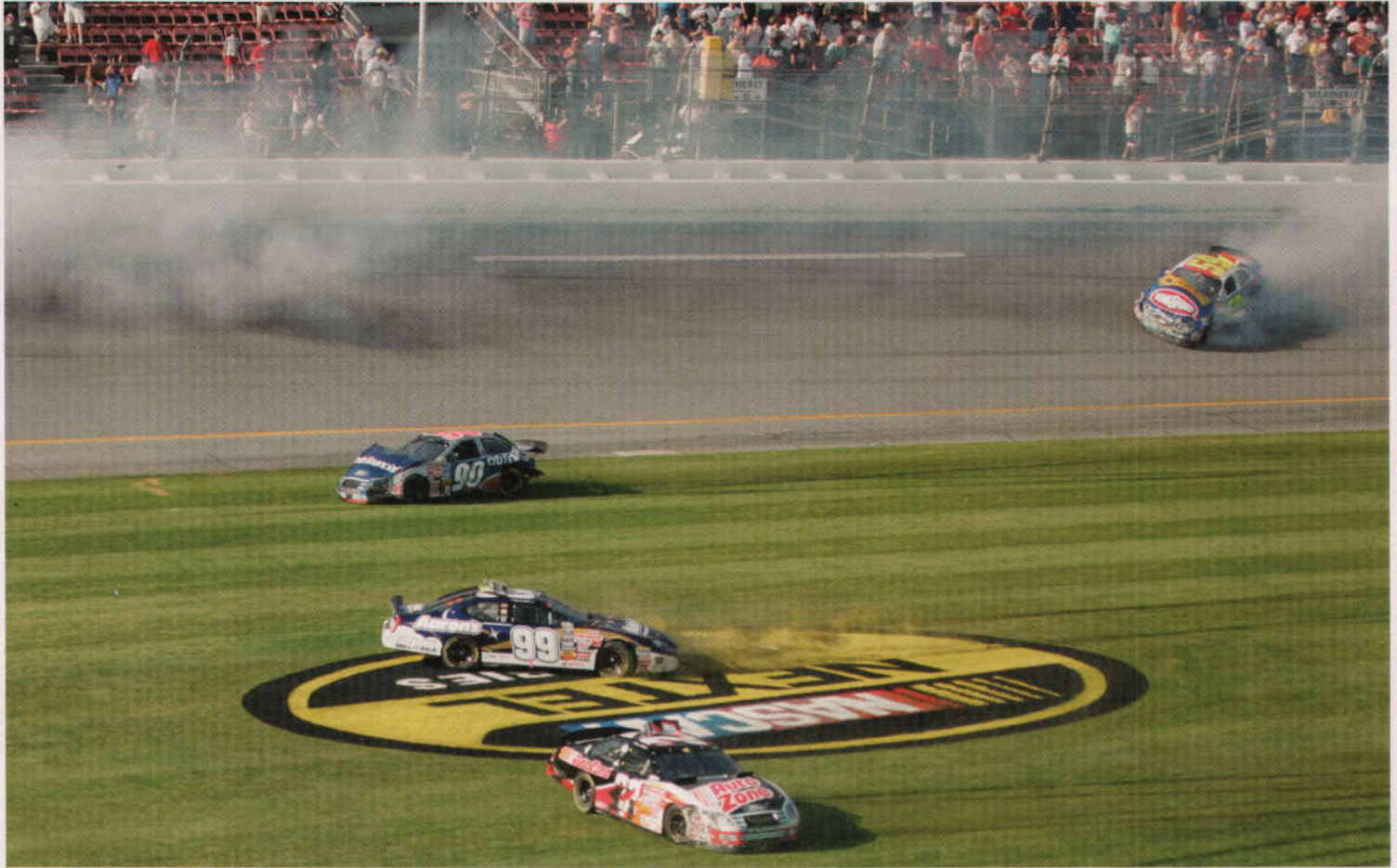
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Daytona's turf is part of the show

By Eric Schroder

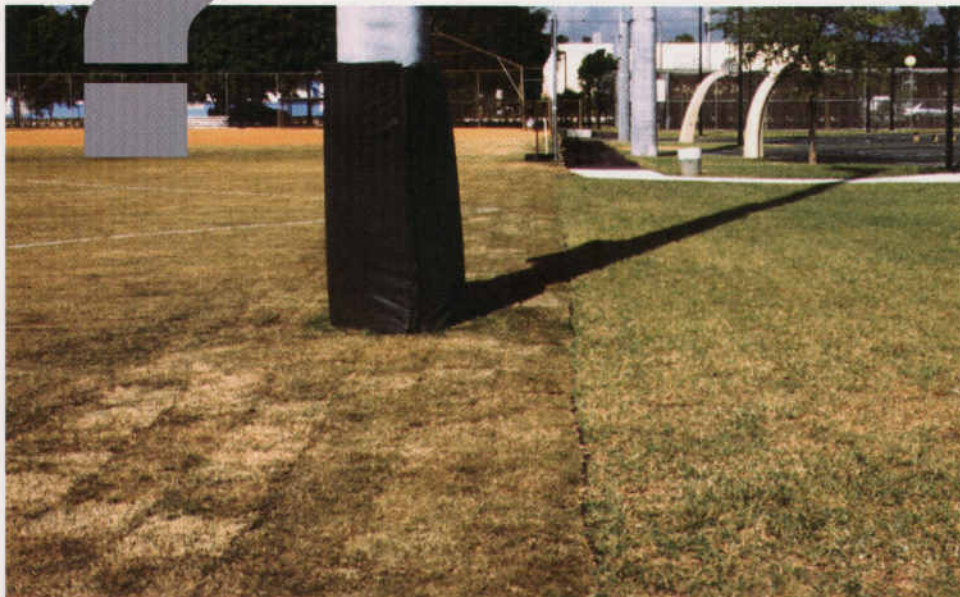
Sam Newpher's career in turf management started traditionally, as an assistant groundskeeper at Atlanta's old Fulton County Stadium back in the 1970's. He eventually was named the head guy and spent 8 years maintaining the field for the Braves and Falcons. He moved to golf for 6 years, and then took the job he's now had for 12 years, superintendent of grounds and turf at the Daytona International Speedway (DIS). NASCAR dads, eat your hearts out!

"My maintenance schedule isn't that much different here than it was for baseball," he says, "except we keep the turf a bit more firm. Safety is

still the major goal. When you have a 3,500-pound racecar sliding across your turf, you're more worried about the driver than you are the turf."

Newpher is responsible for 550 acres of turf at the world's most famous speedway and has a crew of five to assist. There's another "green team" responsible for trees and other landscaping; Newpher is strictly the grass man. Newpher says his boss, VP of Operations Dick Hahne, wants to make sure when the Daytona 500 runs in February that "the grass is bright green, the flowers look perfect, and the tropical nature of the track is complete," so that fans watching up north say to themselves, "Let's go to the race next year!"

Can you identify this sports turf problem?



Problem: Black line between field and common area

Turfgrass Area: Athletic Field

Location: Pinecrest Village, FL

Grass Variety: Bermudagrass athletic field and St. Augustine grass common area.

Answer to John Mascaro's Photo Quiz on Page 48

*John Mascaro is President
of Turf-Tec International*



IT'S AN "UNWRITTEN RULE" ACCORDING TO NEWPHER THAT ONLY THE DAYTONA 500 WINNER CAN SPIN OUT ON THE TURF LOGO IN THE TRI-OVAL.

"By the day of the Daytona 500 (the "Super Bowl" of NASCAR) only 40 acres of those 550 are not being used for something," says Newpher. "Fans take over about 10 acres, for example, and the drivers' RV park is another four acres, and it goes on and on. That one day we need to look our best and often, the turf looks its worst,

at least to the crew and me. People are all over it that week so we irrigate as little as possible."

The most famous, and visible, section of Newpher's turf is 5 acres known as the "tri-oval" that sports the huge Daytona logo. This logo is 200 feet long, with 34-foot high letters and an apex of 68 feet at the top of the flag in the middle. It's this tri-oval, so close to the track itself, that periodically gets an out of control race car skidding across it. (Newpher has an acre of replacement turf growing near the track.)

"We used to string out the logo ourselves until our 50th anniversary (in 1998)," says Newpher. "To celebrate the anniversary we changed the logo and added more logos to the tri-oval, as well to the backstretch and Turn #3, and it became a lot more work. Now Missouri Turf Paint does

all the logos because they are so complicated and time-consuming. They bring a 200-foot stencil for the main logo and work exclusively at night since it's way too dangerous to be that close to the track when it's 'hot'."

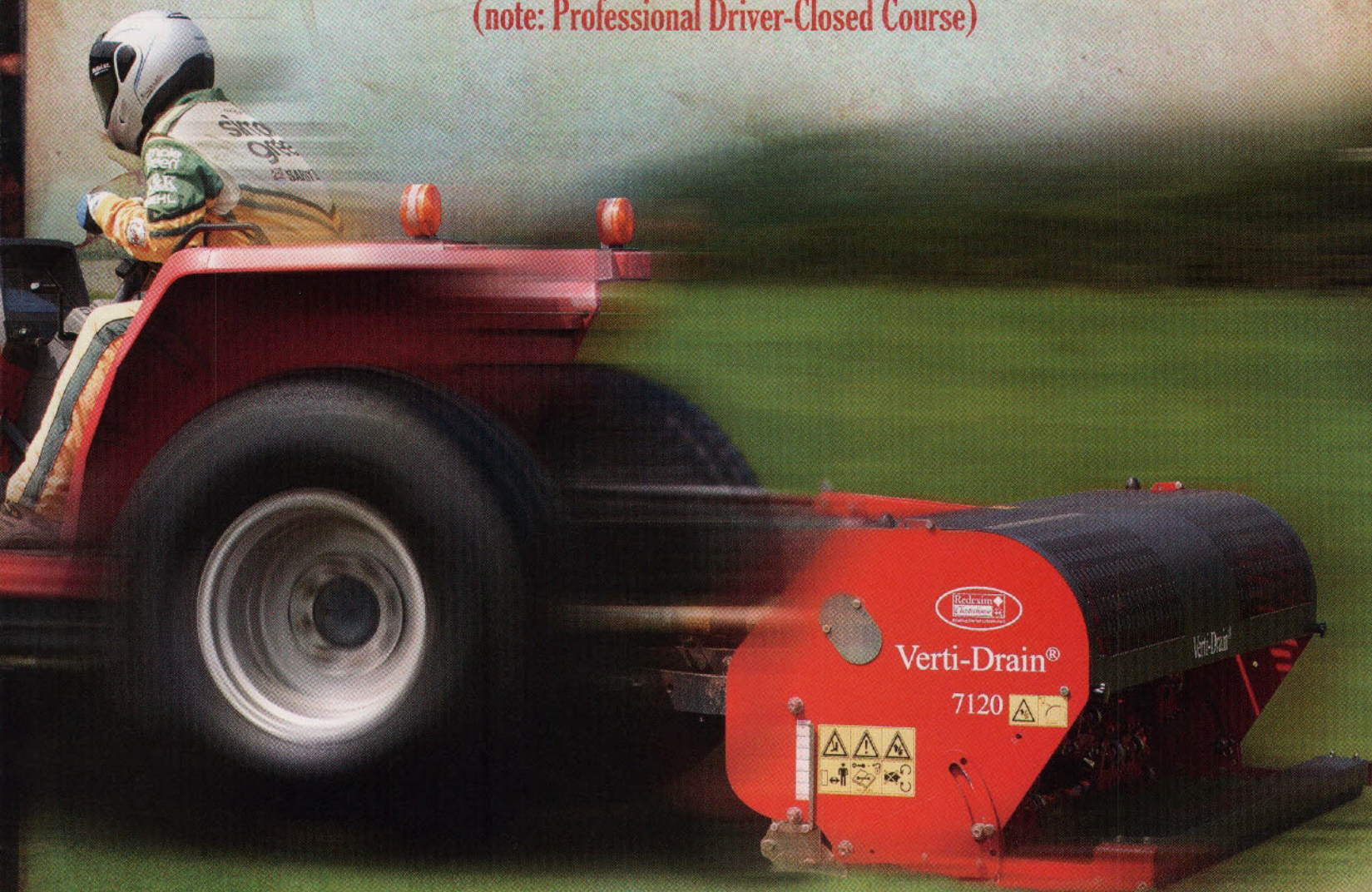
It's an "unwritten rule" according to Newpher that only the Daytona 500 winner can spin out on the turf logo in the tri-oval. He says his greatest memory of the great race was when the late Dale Earnhardt, driver of the black #3 Chevy and known as "The Intimidator," finally won Daytona after 20 tries and proceeded to spin doughnuts on top of the logo's flag. "The fans went absolutely nuts, and after the race many of them grabbed some sprigs that had chipped up from his doughnuts," says Newpher.

Another memorable moment came 3 years later, during the Pepsi 400 race in July. Earlier that year, Earnhardt had passed away after hitting the wall at Daytona. This day, his son, Dale Earnhardt, Jr., took the lead in the backstretch near the end of the race. "I was in the pit area and you could actually hear the crowd's roar over the noise from the racecars," Newpher recalls.

By the way, if you're thinking you'd be angry if a millionaire race car driver tore up your perfect turf on purpose, you need to know that immediately following the Daytona 500, Newpher every year begins tearing out the turf on the tri-oval for a motocross event the next week. ■

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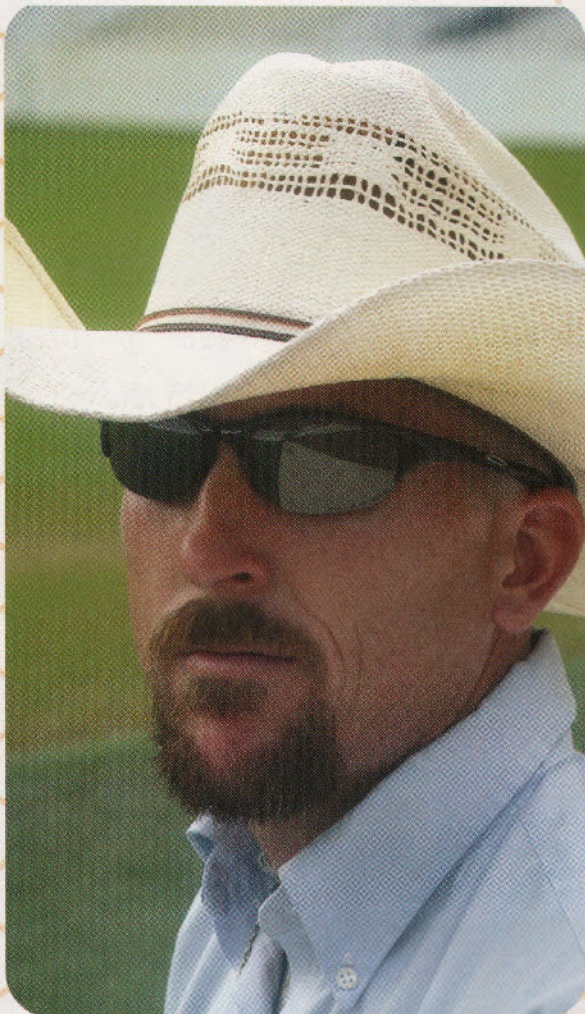
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Kris Harris is the Sports Turf Manager for the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets

WHAT'S A TEXAS AGGIE DOING WITH UGA TURF ON HIS GA TECH FIELD?

Georgia Tech Sport Turf Manager Kris Harris isn't bothered too much about what other people think. "I don't mind being the village idiot for a few months out of the year. All I care about is managing my football and baseball fields for those three or four months when it counts," Harris says. According to most agronomists, nothing Kris does should work.

"For football I go as low as I can go," he says. "We start out in May at 1/2"-7/16" and I go down from there. I keep my baseball field a little higher. We mow it at 3/4" most of the year and take it on down to 1/2" after the season."

Most sports field managers rarely mow their bermudagrass lower than an inch, and never lower than a half-inch. Kris also overseeds very heavily. "I may have 50 to 70 pounds/1000 of rye out by the end of the sea-

son on the football field here at Bobby Dodd Stadium. And usually about 30lbs/1000 on my baseball field. They have to be perfect all season long, not all year long."

The administration and Georgia Tech coaches want the field to be perfect for the spring practice game, too. "So far I've been real lucky there," says Harris. "I've never had to paint the football field green for a game yet. To keep my fields looking good I know I have