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Is K Special?

BY DR. GRADY MILLER

» on the cover



Eddie Warczak of the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers prepares his field for another Midwest League contest. Time Warner Cable Field won the 2008 STMA Professional Baseball Field of the Year Award.



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Personal technology wearing me out

I WAS DRIVING HOME FROM SCOUT CAMP with my son asleep in the back when she stopped short of pulling out in front of me on a two-lane country road. Soon she was following too close. Someone pulled out ahead and I slowed, and she fell back. Then after another mile, again too close. She followed me toward the highway and buzzed by at the first hint of another lane. As she passed I could see the lit cell phone as she held it up directly in her line of vision. There she went, turning without signaling onto the ramp. I lost sight of her on the highway in less than a minute.

In Cheyenne, WY recently a teenager lost her new cell phone after her dad saw the \$4,750 bill for texting, which wasn't part of the family's plan. Dad smashed the phone with his hammer. Score one for dads everywhere!

Twelve years ago I wrote a column titled "I Hate Cell Phones;" while I haven't tekped up much in the ensuing years now of course rely on my cell phone all the time. But my sentiments haven't changed; the intrusion of personal communication devices into our lives is lamentable, not to mention making driving more dangerous than ever.

I read about a 20-year-old college student who is looking forward to his summer job in Cape Cod where wireless connections are reportedly spotty. Seems he's on overload from trying to keep up with all his new best friends or something like that.

Lately I've felt a bit overloaded too, what with all the commotion about texting and twitting. Enough already with all the personal sharing. This is what people's lives have come to? Buy stock now in arthritis medicine companies, I believe all this twitting will result in record sales in the future when the digital nation's thumbs no longer work.

Here's an idea: How about meeting your friends for a cup of coffee?

Regional Conference plug

There's a great continuing education opportunity at Iowa State next month, presented by the Midwest chapters of STMA and headquarters. The 2-day event is relatively inexpensive at \$75/member, \$95/non-member (member of STMA National or Gateway, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, MO-KAN, Nebraska, Ozark, and Wisconsin chapters). That price gets you 2 days of education, exhibition and demo area entrance, and meals. Register at www.STMA.org.

Correction:

We made a mistake on page 44 in April in the photo caption. Obviously the dwarf varieties are on the left and the annual ryegrass on the right. We apologize for the error.

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Commercial members deserve your support

THE ECONOMY is keeping us always looking for opportunities to expand our resources just a little further. One great resource that STMA members have at their disposal is our commercial members. STMA commercial members are critical in the support of STMA events through sponsorship and advertising. They are also great resources for learning about the latest technology that is available for the sports turf manager, helping each of us increase our efficiency.

Our budgets are tight and stretched, but when you have the opportunity to make purchases of products, equipment and services for your spring, summer and fall field preparations, I would encourage you to conduct your research online with STMA's Industry Sourcebook, the world's largest sports turf specific buyer's guide. You can get to the link for the Sourcebook from STMA's homepage (www.STMA.org).

Once you are within the Industry Sourcebook, you have the ability to search for specific resources by the categories that are listed. You can refine your search to include STMA members and/or exhibitors, and association sponsors. You can get more specific, as well, to include certain key phrases along with designating a certain radius of miles specific to your location. It will return to you a list of options for you to further refine and research based on the information that you are seeking. The list will also allow you to compare features and benefits of the products. STMA members are designated with an STMA logo. Every STMA commercial member is represented with a listing.

Please consider buying from STMA commercial members. Our commercial members invest in our association through advertising in this magazine and elsewhere, exhibiting, sponsorship and committee service, which in turn allows STMA to enhance its programs and services to you. Purchasing from STMA commercial members is even more critical during these tough economic times. On behalf of the STMA Board of Directors, I offer a sincere "thank you" to all of our commercial members for your continued support of our association. We appreciate all that you do for us.

Regional Conference June 24-25 at Iowa State

Make plans now to attend the Midwest Regional Conference and Exhibition that will be held in Ames, IA, June 24-25, on the Iowa State University campus. Eight chapters are involved in the planning process: Gateway, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Mo-Kan, Nebraska, Ozarks, and Wisconsin. The 2-day event will feature equipment and cultural practices demonstrations, turf research plot tours, an outdoor exhibition, tours of the ISU sports facilities, a full day of indoor classroom education with two concurrent sessions, a golf outing, a softball competition and a barbecue.

You can find more information about the conference including registration, exhibiting, and hotel accommodations at www.STMA.org. STMA plans to expand its regional conferences next year, and the Chapter Relations Committee is developing a model that will define the criteria for other chapters that are interested in having STMA bring a regional conference to their area.

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Transitioning from student to assistant sports turf manager

MANY STUDENTS working on sports fields while in college are often preparing themselves for work as a professional sports turf manager once they graduate. Some of these individuals will transition from student to assistant sports field manager right out of school.

Making a smooth transition will be determined by the individual's knowledge of subjects such as basic turfgrass management, soils, all aspects of pest identification and control and basic turfgrass mathematics to name a few. Also, experience as a student worker on sports fields, intramural fields or summer internships on sports fields will provide invaluable experience that will aid in making successful transition from college student to an assistant sports turf manager.

A frequent comment I often hear from sports turf managers is the lack of basic mathematic skills by some of the young students entering the profession [Editor's note: see "Math 101 for sports turf managers" on p. 16 in our Feb. 2009 issue]. I should note that this problem is not unique to sports field management. Assistant sports turf managers are often in charge of applying fertilizers/pesticides on the fields or they are in charge of supervising the application of these products. It is critical that this person be able to accurately calculate the amount of material needed for each application. Under application of fertilizers generally results in poor color, growth and recovery, while under application of a pesticide usually means poor control.

On the other hand, over application of these materials can result in severe injury to the turfgrass and in some cases loss of turfgrass on the field. We have all heard the horror stories of turfgrass managers being fired due to the misapplication of either fertilizers or pesticides. Along with being able to calculate proper rates, being able to correctly calibrate sprayers and spreaders requires basic mathematic skills. In many cases, the misapplication is due to improper sprayer or spreader calibration and not miscalculation of amount of product required.

It is very important that students graduating and entering the profession have a good understanding of mathematics and especially the basic mathematics of turfgrass. To find information on turfgrass mathematics, just Google basic turfgrass mathematics and you can find some very good books on basic turfgrass mathematics as well as Extension bulletins dealing with the subject.

A comment often heard by new employees in the sports field profession is, "I wish I had majored in sports field management while in college." While having a degree in basic turfgrass management doesn't automatically mean success, not having a degree in turfgrass management doesn't mean you can't become a successful assistant sports field manager.

Some of today's most successful sports field managers did not major in turfgrass management while in college and in some cases, never attended college. However, most of these individuals will tell a young college student entering the profession that the more basic turfgrass maintenance knowledge they obtain while in school and the more turfgrass work experience they obtain while in college, the easier the tran-



» STUDENT WORKERS preparing skinned area for college baseball game.

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➤ **STUDENT WORKERS** preparing football field for game day.

sition will be from college student to assistant sports field manager.

As mentioned above, gaining work experience on sports fields while in college is a very important part of successful transition from student to an assistant sports turf manager. While attending school, try to secure employment on the sports turf maintenance staff, intramural staff or even on the grounds/landscape staff. These jobs will provide invaluable experience for future work in the profession.

Most schools with a turfgrass management curriculum will assist their students in obtaining summer employment as an intern. My recommendation would be to sign up for as many internships as possible while in school. If possible, vary the type of sports fields you work on as an intern. While your goal may be to become a sports turf manager in baseball, you never know what the future will bring. Again, the more varied work experience background you obtain while in school, the greater chance you will have in becoming successful. While working as an intern, don't be afraid to ask questions. As interns, you will be working with some of the more knowledgeable and experienced individuals in sports turf management, so this will be a great opportunity to learn from the experts.

“Soft” skills important

Good communication and personal management are some more key skills needed for making the transition from student to assistant sports turf manager. A key trait found in most successful managers is their ability to effectively communicate with their crews as

well as with their owners or bosses, players and in some cases the general public. Managers that can effectively communicate their needs to produce a healthy, safe sports field for the team is more likely to get the staff, equipment and supplies needed to produce the desired product.

Managers who cannot effectively communicate are generally going to have trouble obtaining the staff, equipment and supplies needed to be successful. Another problem some new assistant sports turf managers face is getting older, more experienced employees to listen to them or to respect their knowledge and experience. Again, effective communications will allow the new assistant manager to obtain the respect of these older, experienced employees in a much shorter period of time.

A new assistant sports field manager should have the basic understanding of how to develop a budget for their facility. I have listened to several sports turf managers discuss the tremendous problems they had the first time their boss/owner asked for next year's budget. Some of the more basic information required for developing a sports field budget include; total salary/benefits for all employees, equipment maintenance and repairs, fuel, fertilizers/pesticides, paint for logos and striping fields, irrigation costs such as cost of water, electricity and irrigation equipment repairs, cost for seed and/or sod to renovate fields and overhead costs such as buildings and utilities. While in school, be sure and take the basic business management courses that generally offered by most col-

leges. Also, some schools offer turfgrass business management classes as part of their turfgrass programs. These courses will provide valuable information on how to develop a budget.

Possessing a good work ethic is another key trait individuals hiring assistants look for in college graduates entering the profession. Managing sports fields not only requires long hours, but often can require 7-day work weeks. Owners or managers hiring new assistants are going to be looking for individuals who are willing to put in the long hours required to produce a healthy, safe playing surface for the players. Individuals lacking a good work ethic are probably going to struggle with becoming successful in this industry.

New assistant sports turf managers are often overwhelmed with everything they need to know to get the job accomplished and in some cases lack the knowledge to know where to get help. When needing assistance, don't be afraid to call other sports field managers. One of the things that has always impressed me about the sports turf profession is the willingness of professionals to assist fellow managers, particularly new managers.

Other means of getting help is to join professional organizations such as the national Sports Turf Managers Association, state chapters if available and state turfgrass associations. Also, many state colleges and universities have turfgrass teaching, research and Extension personnel on staff. These individuals can provide valuable help. Most young people today are very knowledgeable in the use of computers; new managers can go online and find some great university turfgrass websites as well as commercial websites dealing with sports turf management.

Transitioning from a college student to an assistant sports field manager can be a very rewarding experience. The more educational experience you have in turfgrass management and the more work experience you have in sports turf management while in college, the easier it will be to make this transition. ■

Dr. James McAfee is the Extension Turfgrass Specialists for the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Dallas. In 2006 he received STMA's Dr. William H. Daniel Award for his long-time support of the association.