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Off-season/non-traditional events at your facility

YOUR BOSS CALLS and tells you you're hosting a series of concerts on the sports field you have poured your time, knowledge and dedication into. The worst possible scenarios flash through your mind as you picture masses of traffic, soil compaction and dead grass. Fortunately you are not the only sports turf manager that needs to deal with event issues. With proper planning, preparation and communication, your sports field can be back and in playable condition within a few days. Rest easy with some tips to help your event go more smoothly.

Keep invoices, rental agreements and any other receipts or paperwork. You never know when this may be needed.

BEFORE THE EVENT

Events are stressful, but sports turf managers that stay involved and communicate openly often see the most success. Involving yourself from the beginning and staying informed is essential so you are aware of plans and expectations for the event. Be sure to attend all the contract talks and event meetings with the event promoter, administration and other individuals. Do your research and be prepared to ask questions, present concerns, communicate your needs and influence how the field is used. You know your field best, so be prepared to explain in detail why something can or cannot take place. Establishing clear lines of communication with key individuals can help avoid miscommunication, establish your own credibility and give you the opportunity to present realistic expectations for field recovery.

The following questions can be presented during meetings to assist you in determining expectations for the event and to develop a field recovery plan.

- How many events will be taking place?
- Who will be using the field? What age group takes part in the events?
- What shoe type is needed for the event?
- What will participants be doing during the event? What sport or event will be taking place?
- How many participants will there be? Will there be seating or parking issues?
- What time of year will the event take place? What time of day will the event take place?
- How long will the event last? What is the frequency of the damage? One day? Two weeks?
- Where on the field will the damage be taking place?
- What is the budget for the event and the field?
- Are there any site or location issues that need to be addressed?
- How will the field be needed? Will a floor covering be put down? Will the turf be used?
- Is the event being scheduled around other events? What is the time period to get the field back into playable condition?

Prepare a budget in advance based on expected damage. This should include field maintenance before and after the event, field repair, field protection, replacement costs, staff and labor costs, and any other costs associated with the event. Present it to the event promoter and administration. Be honest in your budget and be realistic and clear with what is necessary to get the field back in healthy, safe, playable condition in a reasonable time period.

Keep accurate and detailed records. Keep a copy of the contract so you know exactly what you are responsible for. Take pictures of the entire event from start to finish. Keep invoices, rental agreements and any other receipts or paperwork. You never know when this may be needed.

Manage your staff respectfully and efficiently. Keep a positive attitude to prevent both you and them from getting stressed out. Train employees so everyone is equally skilled and you are not limited to certain people doing specialized tasks. This builds respect and trust within the crew. Reward creativity and teamwork. And most importantly, have fun.

Manage your turf. Maintaining the quality of the field right up until the event takes place will promote faster recovery. Even if the field is being replaced, maintaining the field at a high level will display your dedication and professionalism and may give you leverage during contract and budget negotiations.

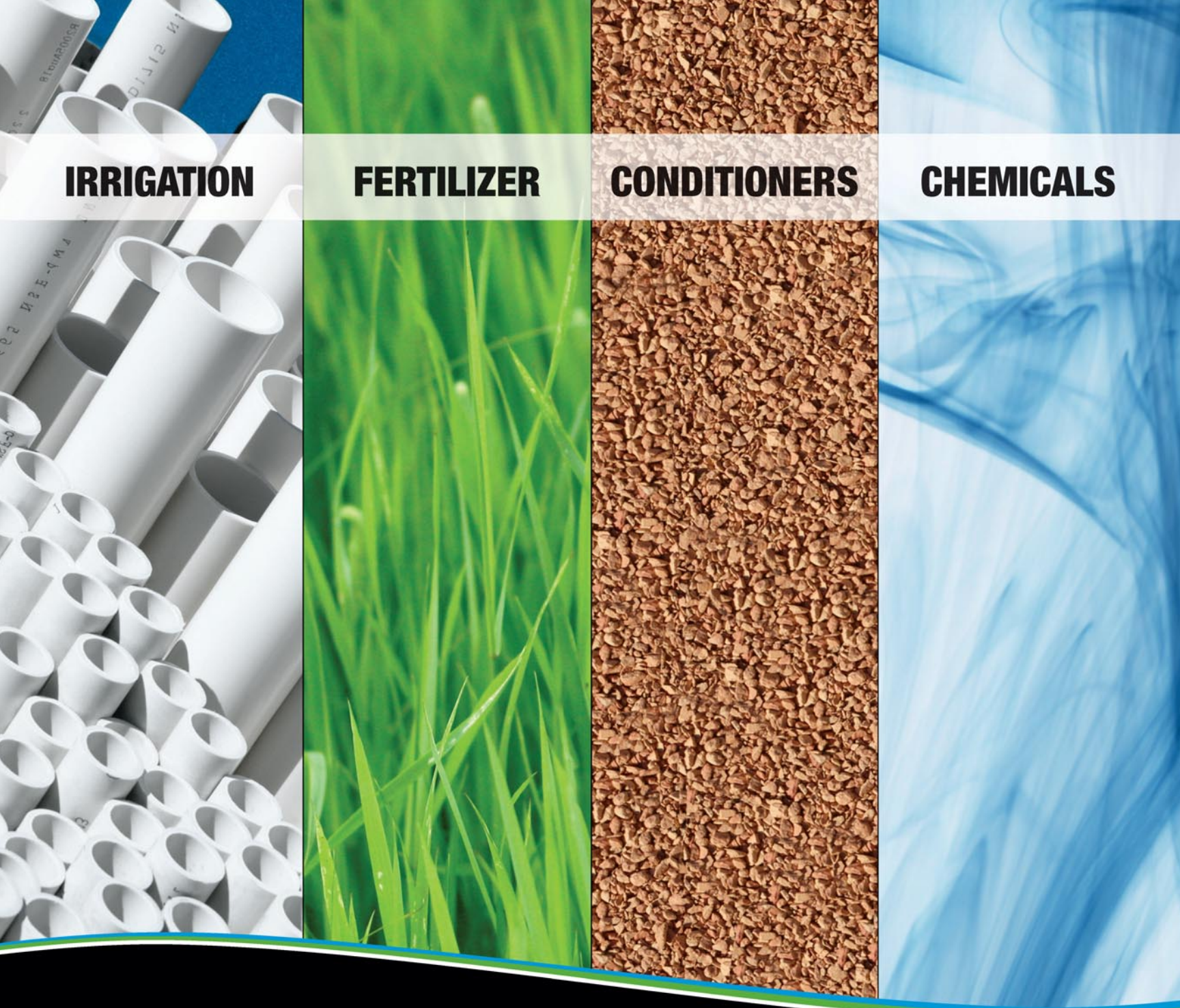
Use your network. STMA provides an excellent network of sports turf managers that have extensive event experience and are always more than willing to provide insight and tips on their own experiences.

POST-EVENT

Now the real work begins. Depending on the event and the damage your field sustained, recovery can vary. Some events may require total field replacement, while other events may only need cultivation, topdressing, and seeding to get the field back into safe, playable condition. After the event is over, take stock of the damage and determine if it is what you expected or if there is additional repair necessary. Communicate with administration about the damage and be honest. Sugar coating the condition of the field will only hurt you in the long run. The bottom line is if you planned properly prior to the event, presented realistic expectations about damage to administration, and agreed on a budget, the recovery process can be relatively quick and successful.

Events can be stressful, but by keeping a positive attitude and an open mind, you can accept the challenges and turn it into a fun, learning experience that will benefit you for the future. ■

This is the third in a series of seven articles in the 2010 Ewing Professional Development Series. STMA and Ewing have again partnered in this series to bring sports turf industry professional development and career issues to the forefront. For more information, go to www.STMA.org or www.Ewing1.com.



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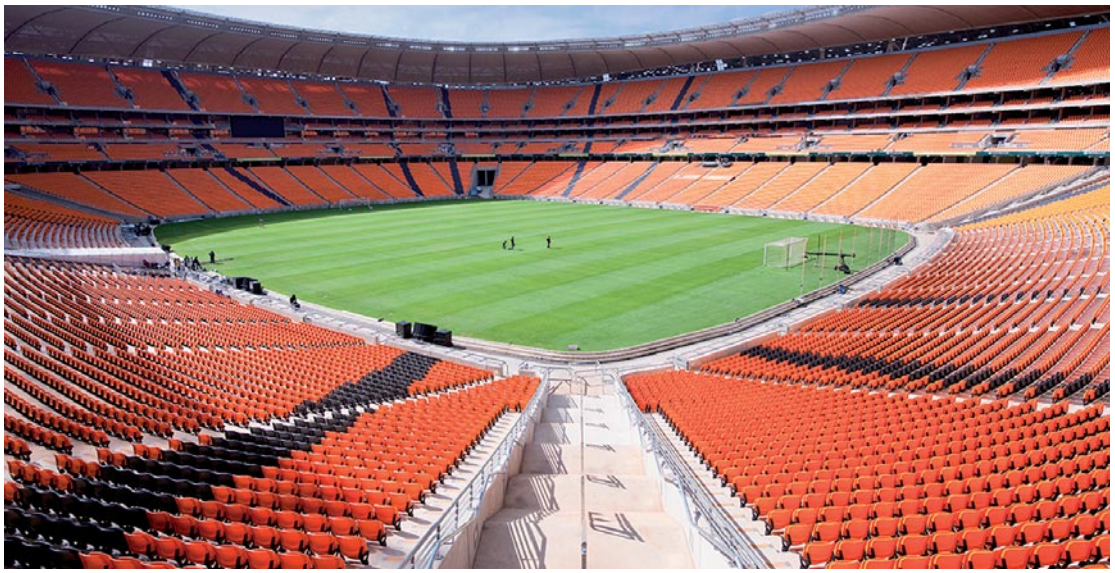

» **SOCCER CITY** in Johannesburg, South Africa

Building Soccer City for the World Cup

Interview with Fanus Cloete CEO Evergreen Turf of Johannesburg, South Africa

ONE OF THE WORLDS MOST TAXING EVENTS for sports turf, this year's FIFA World Cup was even more strenuous due to one of South Africa's coldest winters on record. If you religiously watched the 2010 World Cup or just the final match at Soccer City in Johannesburg then you have probably seen a field built, maintained or supplied by Evergreen Turf, the largest supplier of sod in the southern hemisphere.

Fanus Cloete, the CEO of Evergreen Turf in Johannesburg, South Africa, discussed in a recent interview many of the challenges and successes that his company found while constructing and maintaining several fields for the international event, including: Soccer City, Ellis Park, Vodacom Park, Moses Mabhida Stadium, four partial stadium training venues and five base camps.

FIFA's website calls Soccer City, home of the final match between Netherlands and Spain, "One of the most artistic and awe-inspiring football venues on the African continent." Soccer City was an ideal location for the final match of the inclusive World Cup given the country's political history. A symbol of a unified South Africa, the stadium hosted Nelson Mandela's first mass rally after his release from prison. Built in the mid 1980s, Soccer City, and several of the other stadium fields were due for some serious upgrades to meet FIFA's modern standards.

In November 2008, Evergreen Turf began construction on Soccer City's new premier pitch. According to Evergreen Turf's website, "The specification required a 'premier' playing field to be constructed incorporating technology to produce high drainage, non-compacting sand growing medium over a gravel layer with subsoil drains." Many of these soccer fields, especially Soccer City, were designed to withstand the high impact of the World Cup, while balancing potential weather disturbances. Specifically, the Soccer City field was designed to drain 3.9 inches of rain per hour, while maintaining proper grass growth. While this system's capabilities have not been tested during the World Cup, the field did receive 4 inches of rain and remained playable during the Confederations Cup in June 2009.

Of course the high rate of water evacuation can be attributed to the field's fast-draining sand and drainage system, but Cloete believes that the incorporation of Fiber Reinforced Natural Turf, is what makes the entire field playable. The key to how the system works lies in the construction of the field.

Evergreen Turf began by excavating the first 9.8 inches of existing soil. The drainage and irrigation lines were then installed, followed by a laser graded gravel layer. A USGA approved silica sand, amended with 3% organic matter and 3% topsoil, was then brought in and leveled. StaLok Fiber, the fiber blended into the rootzone to reinforce the natural turf, was then spread at a rate of 6.6 lbs. per ton of sand, by use of a spreader, but in most cases spread by hand as the government encouraged the use

FIFA's website calls Soccer City, home of the final match between Netherlands and Spain, "One of the most artistic and awe-inspiring football venues on the African continent."

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LEGENDARY

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of local labor for the World Cup. This was then tilled to a 3-inch depth with a Rotadairon. Again the field was leveled by laser grader to a specified 1% crown. Finally, the sand base was saturated and Kikuyu stolons were sprigged.

Most World Cup fields were sprigged with Kikuyu, some were sodded with TifSport and almost every field was overseeded with Rye, although Cloete said that "in some areas the Rye will transition very quickly because of the tropical climate." While Kikuyu does well in shady conditions and recovers quickly from wear, from a maintenance standpoint Cloete was not completely sold on the idea. "I do not believe that Kikuyu was the right grass to use. The thing about Kikuyu is that the rhizomes are really thick, requiring us to verticut quite often. This made things difficult as the specifications required us to start overseeding in early March."

TifSport was used in Moses Mabhida Stadium because of the unique challenges that construction presented Evergreen Turf. Roof construction on the stadium limited Cloete's team to a very short time frame for the field installation. Not having enough time to establish sprigs, let alone effectively establish sod, Cloete says he relied heavily on new technology emerging from the US and Australia, the StaLok Instant Play system, most notably used at the University of Phoenix Stadium, home of the Arizona Cardinals and site of the U.S. vs. Mexico Soccer friendly 3 years ago. Growing the TifSport in the new system, allowed him to deliver a playing surface that performed like an established field in a much shorter time frame.

MANAGING MAINTENANCE

Cloete oversaw the maintenance on 22 fields through the end of July. He keeps three men on most of the Stadiums and high use practice fields and uses a roaming crew of 7 men to help repair divots.

In an open-air stadium like Soccer City, Cloete noted that the cold made for a different schedule for his crew: "We started with a 4/3/4 fertilizer during overseeding, moved to a 5/1/5, then to a Green Sulfate and finally we used a MAP (Mono-Ammonium Phosphate) to stimulate root growth during cold on fields without the Fiber Reinforced Natural Turf."

Cloete explained his crews' schedules have to work around the main events, having to complete all maintenance after each game. Post-game work included repairing divots, mowing in two directions to FIFA's required pattern, and then covering the fields with crop blankets. Such a meticulous schedule can be quite physically demanding on the crew, Cloete noted, "Sometimes the guys would not get out of there until 3 a.m., and it was difficult working in such overnight cold."

Part of maintaining many fields for such a high traffic event is avoiding over-manicuring during the actual tournament play. Cloete explained his methods, "We did not topdress during the tournament. During the growing season we would mow the fields very low and topdress with a sand and fiber mix." Equally essential to fostering the future maintenance of these fields is Cloete's planned post-World Cup field management: Cloete planned to hollow tine aerate the fields after

Continued on page 23

Background illustration courtesy of istockphoto.com

JOHN MASCARO'S PHOTO QUIZ

John Mascaro is President of Turf-Tec International

Can you identify this sports turf problem?

Problem: Soil exposed on parts of field
Turfgrass Area: High school football field
Location: Tiverton, Rhode Island
Grass Variety: Bluegrass/ryegrass blend

Answer to John Mascaro's Photo Quiz on Page 35

By **Mary Helen Sprecher**

» **Far Left:** THE COTTING SCHOOL, located in Massachusetts, has a fully handicap-accessible field for the use of its students. Photos courtesy of Elizabeth Campbell Peters, The Cotting School

» **Left:** CHILDREN PLAY on the artificial turf field at The Cotting School. Most children are classified as medically fragile which impacted decisions regarding design and construction of the field, as well as materials.

» **Bottom Left:** THE COTTING SCHOOL FIELD measures 100 x 125 feet and allows students to participate in sporting events just as their able-bodied counterparts do.

Creating a level playing field for all athletes

WHAT'S SEPARATING THE KID in a wheelchair from his or her able-bodied peers who are playing sports? It might be a lot more than the sidelines of the field.

It might be things many people don't notice: a gate that is just a bit too narrow to get a wheelchair through or a field that is too muddy and uneven for a child who uses a wheelchair or a walker to feel safe. It might be furnishings or benches that an athlete can't get past easily. It might even be a field that lacks just a few accommodations that turn it from being merely usable into an arena that allows the athlete to develop, and to compete with, his or her skills.

The good news, however, is that making an athletic field more accessible doesn't have to mean making drastic changes. Designers of athletic facilities, sports contractors and suppliers of materials have all worked with individual facilities to help break down the barriers and make athletic programs more available to all. Changes, large and small, can be implemented by acting now.

And that's the most important thing to do: act now. Don't wait for a student who is wheelchair-bound (or otherwise mobility-impaired) to request special accommodations. Being proactive can mean the difference between an athlete who becomes an enthusiastic participant, and one who goes away disappointed. (And in today's litigious society, the latter scenario is never a good thing).

GROWING NEED

According to industry insiders, it all starts with understanding the needs of the athletes and to understanding how much that need is growing. And make no mistake about it: adapted sports programs are on the rise.

"There are many fields being built for children with challenges," says Daniel Wright, an STMA member with Sport Turf Company in Whitesburg, GA. "In our area, it is mainly baseball fields constructed with a rubber surface where wheelchairs can roll without difficulty. There are a number of these in the Atlanta area and they have established a Challenger Baseball League. From what I know, those fields are used a lot."

In its most recent High School Athletics Participation Survey, the National Federation of State High School Associations found that adapted sports currently being offered to students with physical challenges included basketball, bowling, floor hockey, soccer, softball and track.

The American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, which works in partnership with educational agencies across the US to establish programs, policies, rules, regulations and more for students with physical disabilities, has also compiled its own list of sports, which include many of the above, as well as wheelchair handball, wheelchair football and beep baseball (played on a flat grassy surface by students with visual impairments). Move up to the rank of elite athletes and you'll find the Paralympic Games, where a wide range of sports (summer and winter, indoors and outdoors) are contested.

But all those athletes had to start somewhere, and most likely, they started on the playgrounds and playing fields of their local schools. And while the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) certainly plays a part in the design of many facilities, its work can only do so much to help ath-

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letes with physical challenges. That's why it's up to those who help build and manage fields to do their part to help break down those barriers.

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD (REALLY)

Sometimes, the needs of individuals with mobility impairments are overlooked because they're a small percentage of the population. That was not the case in the Cotting School in Lexington, MA. The school is specifically for students with special needs. Of its approximately 120 students, 40% have wheelchairs or walkers, according to president David Manzo.

"We have a fully accessible campus of 14 acres, but when I arrived, we had one hurdle left: how do you get kids in wheelchairs and walkers to play outside on a sports field? We have children in all kinds of wheelchairs, including some power chairs, which are really heavy. It just can't be done without a synthetic surface."

Cotting worked with Boston-based athletic facility designer Stantec Sport, which studied the students' needs and came up with a game plan for a field that would work.

"Our response was to test a number of different types of synthetic turf, which is accessible," said Stantec's Patrick Maguire, also an STMA member. "Grass is not. We settled on a surface that utilized a shorter carpet pile (to keep it standing upright) and filled it up much higher in the pile. This enabled much easier wheelchair access. We also made sure to remove all latex and rubber from the carpet and the infill. Instead of latex backing we used urethane and instead of crumb rubber we used thermoplastic elastomer (TPE)."

Polytan USA of Marietta, GA was one of the suppliers who contributed to the project. Athletic facility contractor RAD Sports of Rockland, MA did the construction. The finished field opened in September 2009 with an all-school soccer game. And that was just the beginning.

"We've been able to do Saturday morning soccer programs, so that children can play soccer on the field. These are things their typically developing peers are doing," says Manzo. "Parents, grandparents, everyone, comes out and watches the kids play."

Manzo is pleased with the field which allows wheelchairs to roll easily, but still protects children who fall. The students are all medically fragile, he notes, so accidents on the playing field are a big concern. The field measures 100 x 125 feet which, as he notes, might be modest to some schools, "but for us, it's perfect."

Sometimes, the lessons from someone in a different sport can help field managers understand their own facility better. Jeremiah Yolkut, who works with the United States Tennis Association, says that in wheelchair tennis, it's the actual entryway onto the court that can give players trouble.

"While it's standard for many facilities to have 42-inch wide gates, you want to have a wider opening for players in wheelchairs because of what we call the camber, or the angle in the wheels that you'll see in an athletic wheelchair," says Yolkut. "You're much more likely to go to a 48-inch wide opening because that means you don't have to take a wheel off the chair to get it through the gate."

While not all players are self-conscious about having to get out of a wheelchair and 'scoot through' any gates, then reassemble the chair inside (or have it passed over the fence to them), most would rather have one less barrier. Amenities and accessories on the sidelines of the field, including team benches, seating for statisticians or scorekeepers, etc., should be chosen with the athletes in mind. Make sure such items can be moved easily so that players can get past it without a struggle.

Making it easy, notes Yolkut, means the player has a more enjoyable experience. Making it difficult can leave a bad taste in an athlete's mouth, "and you don't want people leaving the sport and thinking, 'They don't seem to want to make this easy for me, so why should I bother to play?'"

When working to make accommodations for the athletes, remember that such events may begin to draw spectators who have mobility limitations as well. If applicable, adjust seating so that someone in a wheelchair is able to have good sightlines and to have adequate seating around them to fit their friends, either able-bodied or not. No spectator wants to sit in an area that is isolated from the rest of the crowd.

According to Yolkut, the USTA tends to pick out tournament facilities that are attractive to everyone. Facilities with elevators, without steep ramps, and with seating that allows spectators who are wheelchair-bound (or otherwise mobility-impaired) to move around easily all make for a good experience.

SAFETY FIRST

Then there are the aspects of wheelchair competition that many people don't even know about, according to Matt Hale of Halecon in Bridgewater, NJ. Having these, he notes, can make all the difference between a facility that is not just accessible but welcoming.

"Something I believe is critical, yet often missed is adequate shade for temperature control," Hale notes. "Many individuals with spinal cord or brain injuries are extremely sensitive to temperature, particularly to heat. Some can have life-threatening heat reactions which can occur with little warning. Plan as much shade as possible. I would just stress that surfaces that throw off heat should be avoided. The more shade, the better."

Synthetic turf can hold heat, so keep a careful eye on the surface temperature, and make sure players, administrators, parents, coaches and officials, as well as spectators, are taking all necessary safety precautions.

Plan for athletes' needs both on and off the track or playing field, Hale adds. Having water sources at or near the facility is a must, but so are some other things. "If possible, a cool-down area would be helpful, possibly an enclosed space attached to a bathroom facility, air-conditioned, with electric outlets and water. This space could