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SportsTurf Contents

FEBRUARY 2011 | VOLUME 27 | NUMBER 2

Features

- 8** Interview with the new president of STMA, Troy Smith, CSFM

Field Science

- 14** Skin surface selection and management for infields
18 **What's your infield mix?**
Veteran infield skin managers tell about their infield mixes and why they chose that combination and/or products
20 Factors to consider when total infield renovation is not an option
24 Recovering turf from severe weather

Facilities & Operations

- 26** What I wished I had learned in turf school
28 One option for keeping your indoor facility clean
30 Tips on maintaining infill synthetic turf

Irrigation & Drainage

- 32** Building good drainage for synthetic fields

Tools & Equipment

- 36** The first winners of STMA's Innovation Award
37 New infield groomers & other new products

Departments

- 6** From the Sidelines
7 STMA President's Message
17 John Mascaro's Photo Quiz
38 STMA in Action
42 Ask a CSFM
43 STMA Chapter Contacts
44 Marketplace
45 Advertisers' Index
46 Q&A
-



On the cover: Troy Smith, CSFM, of the Denver Broncos is the new president of the Sports Turf Managers Association. Photo by Eric Lars Bakke.



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From the Sidelines



Eric Schroder
Editor

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Pitchers & catchers

As I write it is only 24 days until the first spring training reporting date for MLB-rostered pitchers and catchers, a date that normally warms even the coldest hearts of baseball fans. Readers in the South and Southwest may be excited about the upcoming season but also in many areas they are already working on their baseball and softball fields, or at least pulling tarps to see what winter wrought.

The respite from outdoor activities that most turf managers in and north of the transition zone enjoy (or endure for some of you I suspect) includes the second week in January, traditional date for STMA's Annual Conference & Exhibition. It might be the only week on the calendar that the vast majority of members are able to get away from their facilities, the usually notable exception being those whose NFL employers are still in the playoffs.

This year's event, held 30 years after the association was officially formed by men who believed that sports turf could be improved through sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas, most likely would have astounded those founders in its volume of knowledge and ideas. Multiple education sessions were offered on topics such as sustainability, water, construction, agronomy, professional development, synthetic turf, and more. STMA sets up the event to maximize the chances of meeting people, comparing notes, asking advice, and making friends.

Another aspect of the Conference I always marvel at is the contributions made by two groups: Industry VIPs and association commercial member companies. While I'm certain not one of these people considers themselves a VIP, the cream of the crop shows for this meeting; some examples include Mike Andresen, Mike Boekholder, Dr. Jim Brosnan, Tom Burns, Bob Campbell, Murray Cook, Darian Daily, Larry DiVito, Chad Follis, Amy Fouty, Dr. Mike Goatley, Leo Goertz, Dr. Tony Koski, Ross Kurcab, Barney Lopas, Dr. James McAfee, Dr. Andy McNitt, Dr. Grady Miller, Dr. Dave Minner, Brad Park, Craig Potts, Dr. A.J. Powell, Dr. John Sorochan, Dr. John Stier, Mike Trigg, among many others.

The commercial member companies pay to exhibit their products and services and what a bonanza for sports turf managers—virtually anything you need to do your job is on display. Further, without the dough these companies produce, there is no Founders Awards, Student Challenge, golf tournament, or SAFE scholarships. Kudos to this year's conference sponsors: Barenbrug USA, Carolina Green, Covermaster, Diamond Pro, Hunter Industries, Jacobsen, Rain Bird, Toro, and World Class Athletic Surfaces.

A former pitcher, Troy Smith, was elected president of STMA. Smith is a Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) and becomes the fifth consecutive CSFM to be elected to head the organization. Here's to an early spring for all.

NFL at University of Minnesota follow-up

Last month in this space I wondered if the NFL and ESPN were forcing the issue by not postponing the Dec. 20 Monday night game in Minnesota after the Metrodome roof collapsed in the snow. Crews, led by University of Minnesota turf manager Mike McDonald, had to re-open TCF Bank Stadium for fans and prepare the synthetic turf for the game and there were concerns that the field would be too hard (for details, see p. 46). But, as you'd expect, McDonald and Friends, and a lot of volunteer snow removers, got 'er done and there were no significant injuries save one: the final knockdown of Brett Favre!

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The Official Publication Of The Sports Turf Managers Association

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SportsTurf (ISSN 1061-687X) (USPS 000-292) (Reg. U.S. Pat. & T.M. Off.) is published monthly by m2media360, a Bev-AI Communications company at 1030 W. Higgins Road, Suite 230, Park Ridge, IL 60068. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sportsturf, P.O. Box 2120, Skokie IL 60076-7820. For subscription information and requests, call Subscription Services at (847) 763-9565. Subscription rates: 1 year, \$40 US & Poss.; 2 years, \$65 US & Poss.; 1 year, \$65 Canada/Foreign Surface, 1 year, \$130 Airmail. All subscriptions are payable in advance in US funds. Send payments to Sportsturf, P.O. Box 2120, Skokie, IL 60076-7820. Phone: (847) 763-9565. Fax: (847) 763-9569. Single copies or back issues, \$8 each US/Canada; \$12 Foreign. Periodicals postage paid at Park Ridge, IL and additional mailing offices. COPYRIGHT 2011, SportsTurf. Material may not be reproduced or photocopied in any form without the written permission of the publisher.

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President's Message

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Three-legged stool: money, transparency, and member service

Greetings!

I am honored to be elected your President for 2011, and I appreciate your vote of confidence. I am very much looking forward to serving you. My role is to listen to you and to guide your Board of Directors in three areas: fiscal management, insuring the transparency of the association's operations to the membership, and advancing its programs and services.

Your board has been following a 5-year strategic plan, which is in its final year. We have accomplished much, but we need to continue our momentum to take STMA to the next level. To do this, your board will build on that plan this summer by going through a formalized strategic planning session led by a professional facilitator. Strategic planning allows us to paint a vision for the future and to allocate the resources to achieve that vision. Two very important resources that contribute to this are our committees and our staff. With the committees providing the membership's perspective and our capable headquarters staff executing on the programs and services, we are laying the groundwork for success!

One element of our plan is focused on the annual conference and exhibition. We just completed a very successful event in Austin a few weeks ago. I encourage those of you who attended to keep in touch with the people you met—networking is so very critical to our jobs. The learning opportunities at the conference were outstanding, and the presentations are now online for all members to use. You'll find very practical information in these presentations, so be sure to check them out. Another goal of the association is to deliver education that is accessible, affordable and relevant. To that end, the STMA website continues to add new technical and professional development content (www.stma.org).

New Certified Sports Field Managers roster

In 2010, 19 of our members became certified, and I would like to recognize them. Very soon we'll have the results of those who took the test during the conference, and I know that I'll have many more to acknowledge. Those certified in 2010 include: Scott Bills, CSFM, TJ Brewer, CSFM, Richard Clarke, CSFM, Herb Combs, CSFM, James Cornelius, CSFM, Michael DiDonato, CSFM, Brian Dossett, CSFM, Matt Duncan, CSFM, Robin Edwards, CSFM, Johnathan Knight, CSFM, Josh Marden, CSFM, Josh McPherson, CSFM, Anthony Pell, CSFM, Jonathan Quist, CSFM, Grant Spear, CSFM, James Speelman, CSFM, John Watt, CSFM, Glenl Wear, CSFM, and Roger Weinbrenner, CSFM. Congratulations on your achievement of certification.

In closing, I want to let you know about an important initiative for this year: international outreach and collaboration. We have much to offer the sports turf industry in other countries, and we can learn much from them. A few months ago, I attended the Institute of Groundsmanship's annual conference and awards presentation in the United Kingdom. It was an energizing experience, and I am confident that our International Committee will build on the work of its previous task group to make further inroads internationally.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Troy Smith'.

Leader by design

Troy Smith, CSFM, seems to have been destined for leadership in the sports turf arena



IT DIDN'T TAKE TROY SMITH MANY YEARS to figure out what he wanted to do with his life.

As a 13-year-old growing up in Castle Rock, CO Smith, turf manager for the Denver Broncos Football Club's Englewood practice facility and the incoming president of the Sports Turf Managers Association, went to work for the town's parks and recreation department. There, he learned two foretelling things about himself: He loved being outdoors and he loved taking care of fields.

So, take care of fields, he did, beginning in high school, and to this day he continues to do just that. Along the way, Smith benefitted from some chance connections and wracked up a resume that many would

envy; one that has given Smith the ability to combine his multitude of interests in one plum gig.

PITCHING OPPORTUNITY

In high school, Smith discovered that not only was he personally interested in sports, he was also talented in them—and one in particular.

As a pitcher for his high school's baseball

team, he earned the attention of recruiters, which led to a baseball scholarship at Otero Junior College in LaJunta, CO.

Once it came time to evaluate his future prospects, though, his visions turned to another aspect of the field.

"I found out that I wasn't good enough to be a major league pitcher, that I wasn't going to be drafted," he says. "But I knew I wanted to stay close to sports. I had

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Along the way, Smith benefitted from some chance connections and wracked up a resume that many would envy; one that has given Smith the ability to combine his multitude of interests in one plum gig.

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thought about landscape architecture, but then I found out that there are jobs where you get paid to take care of fields, and I thought that was really cool.”

So, after his pitching years at junior college, Smith headed to Colorado State, where he learned the science of taking care of fields with a degree in landscape horticulture with a concentration in turf-grass management.

Between his junior and senior years at CSU, Smith landed an internship under the direction of Ross Kurcab, CSFM, with his near-hometown Denver Broncos, another foreshadowing chapter in Smith's life story.



On game days, Smith typically doesn't have responsibilities, but many NFL Sundays he still ends up at the practice facility, mowing, painting or getting fields ready for incoming weather.

The experience was one he'll never forget—for many reasons.

“The old practice facility had native soil fields,” Smith says. “At the time we were building a state-of-the-art sand-based facility, and I got to help maintain an old native facility and see the construction of a new sand-based facility. It was priceless.”

The internship also gave one particular opportunity that may have given him a leg up over some of his classmates.

“I'd go to class in the morning and every afternoon go to the (Colorado State) stadium and get to apply what I was learning,” he adds. “My senior year was better because I was actually able to bring things back that were useable after my internship.”

After college, Smith worked in landscape maintenance in Denver for a handful of months, and then applied for a position with the Milwaukee Brewers.

Thanks to a regional turf conference Smith had previously attended in Denver where he met David Mellor (then with the Brewers and currently the turf manager for the Boston Red Sox), Smith had a connection with the organization. He traveled to Wisconsin for the interview, and got the job of grounds assistant for the Brewers.

In another connection that mattered for Smith, the reason the job was available in the first place originates with the STMA.

“One of the STMA founding fathers was Harry Gill, and he was the head groundskeeper with the Milwaukee Brewers,” Smith says. “He had retired, and because of that, I was able to get a job in the profession. A lot of people knew and respected Harry Gill, and I've always kept that opportunity in the profession to myself.”

In addition to that coincidental opportunity and STMA connection, Smith says the Milwaukee job was the perfect chance to learn the ropes of the industry.

“It was great learning,” he says of the job he held for 3 ½ years. “I learned so much from Gary Vanden Berg and David Mellor about baseball, concert, football, personnel and inventory management, along with equipment maintenance. I still use a lot of the things that I learned in Milwaukee today.”

MILE-HIGH MOVE

From there, Smith circled back to Colorado and went back to work permanently for the Denver Broncos. This last year marked Smith's 17th season with the organization. For the past 11 years, he's served as the turf manager of the practice facility, a year-round venue consisting of two full-size natural grass playing fields and one synthetic field, as well as business offices.

“Our players use the field 10 ½ to 11 months a year,” Smith says of the facility that's 17 miles south of the Broncos home stadium, INVESCO Field at Mile High.

Kurcab, who hired Smith as an intern, serves as the turf manager at the 11-year-old stadium.

“We opened the stadium in 2000, and he's been up there ever since,” he says. “We have two turf managers on staff, which is not very common in the league.”

The practice facility also hosts the team's training camp, which has been on-site for 8 years, unlike many teams who travel far distances for camps.

“We've been at this facility for everything over the last 8 years,” Smith adds.

UNDER PRESSURE

Smith doesn't shy away from a challenge, and that's one of his favorite parts of his job.

“I love the pressure of trying to have fields ready all year long,” he says. “I don't enjoy the stress, but I can deal with it. I've gotten better over 10 years of dealing with it. It's a pressure-packed job, but it is very rewarding, particularly when you win the Super Bowl twice. That's what I love about my job.”

Staying on top of the NFL's demands for technology, trends and products means challenging himself to be the best, he adds.