

# Surviving Special Events

by L. Murray Cook

Everyone in our industry has experienced some type of extracurricular event on their field that has caused them to be somewhat agitated because it is not the natural activity of the venue. These activities have been given the name "special" events. Over the years I have had the privilege and sadness of managing special events on many different venues.

My first taste of special-event management was in 1976, the bicentennial year of our country. As head groundskeeper of the Salem Pirates Baseball Club, a Class A affiliate of the Pittsburgh Pirates, I was forced to allow log cabins to be constructed on the field. The event was successful (so they say) and the nails I picked off the field over the next few years were a constant reminder of how I disliked special events.

The entire special-event concept boils down to money. Facilities are

forced to generate revenues to pay athletes and debt from new facility construction. Face it, without the stadium you may need to seek other employment opportunities if ownership does not turn a profit (regardless of how great the field looks). There are stadiums that generate profits from special events that line the pockets of owners and there are events that break even.

In the stadium game, the "sport specific field concept" enables developers and owners to capture funding to build the facility. This is wonderful until they sign John "Over the Hill" Smith for \$2.5 billion and they need to generate additional revenue to cover his salary. Even on the municipal level you have the sport specific youth fields for baseball being booked for softball games and miniature soccer events.

There are several options available to the city governments and facilities

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that plan or need to go down the path of increasing events at a facility.

## Planning

The key to the development of a multi-use facility is planning. First and foremost you must determine the venue usage. Coordinate the key players and champions of the plan objectives, then determine the following goals of the facility:

- \* Who is going to use it?
- \* Community use, collegiate use or professional use-or all of the above?
- \* Which sports will be the anchor for the venue?
- \* What are the capacities of the stadium/building? Seating? Parking?
- \* Are you phasing or planning for growth? Year-round usage?
- \* Clinics? Camps? Tournaments? Concerts? Tractor pulls?
- \* Is there a budget?
- \* Site issues and location?

Once you have determined the

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objectives, you can then create the outline of what type of field you need for use. These objectives will be ongoing as the plan develops, and may include the following:

- \* What are the access points onto the field?
- \* What is the best turf and subsoil for the venue?
- \* Determine length of event season then subtract potential event dates. Is this enough time for maintenance?
- \* Will I need to use field covering, and if so, what are the dimensions of potential field setups?

## Maintenance and Operations

Based on the field size and location you should break down the facility in "tasks" that will allow you to create standard operating procedures. These procedures allow you to schedule maintenance at the facility utilizing a format that separates event maintenance from routine maintenance.

After completing the maintenance needs as they relate to total headcount, you will be simultaneously creating a list of equipment to keep the facility managed at a certain level. The budget outline can then be determined and calculated to establish capital equipment needs.

By following these simple procedures and suggestions you will be able to start your quest for a new facility that will withstand the pressures of players' and owners' use requirements. Through the development your role is to keep the "reality" in place during the design. The design of a facility is one of the last issues of concern outside of building it and using it. The above general steps will in turn assist you with developing the specifications that best suit your needs.

As our industry grows and expands into other venues responsible for growing grass or managing fields we will be on a path that will allow us to adapt to our future. As we adapt to change in

use of our facilities we are only making them better in the long run.

If you are short on funds for renovations and improvements, a great way to protect your field is through the use of special floor coverings developed for turf, such as Forum Floor, Portafloor, terraplast and Sportcourts. These can be rented or purchased, and each provides various levels of turf protection for the special event.

The last and most important issue in handling the dreaded special event is attitude. Approach management in a positive way and explain your concerns through positive dialog. There are numerous ways to keep your field safe if you keep an open mind and concentrate on a solution on how to make it work.

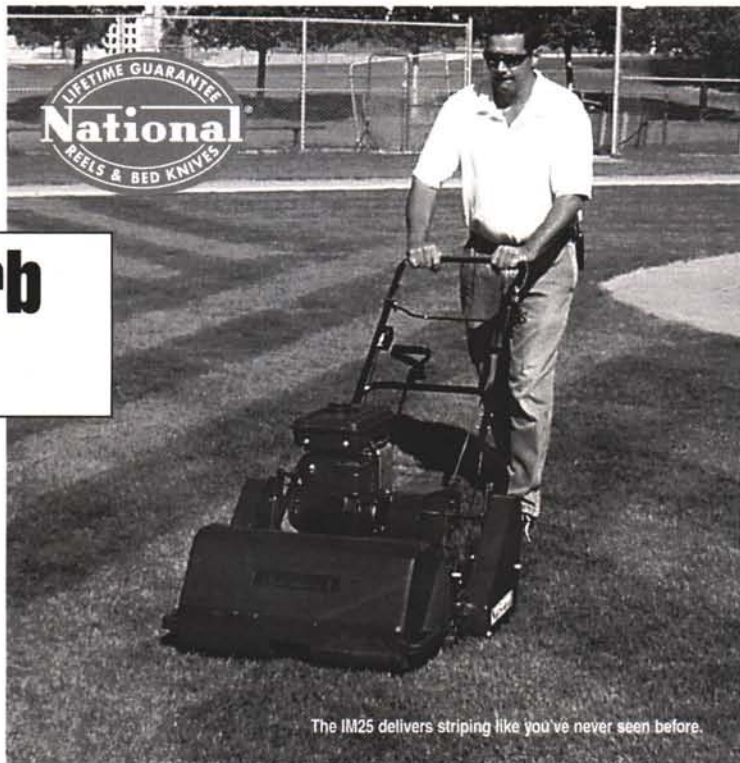
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