

CHAMPIONSHIP FIELD, Seattle University

■ **Category of Submission:** College Soccer
■ **Sports Turf Manager:** Kevin White
■ **Title:** Athletic Fields Supervisor
■ **Education:** Associate's degree in turf and landscaping
■ **Experience:** Bachelor of Science, Ornamental Horticulture/Turfgrass management
Experience: I have been working on the athletic fields at Seattle University for 4 years. Prior to Seattle University, I worked 8 years in golf course maintenance, 4 as an as-

sistant superintendent. While attending Cal Poly Pomona, our Turf Club would renovate a sports field each year.

■ **Full-time staff:** Peter Larson
■ **Part-time staff:** Emily Perales
■ **Original construction:** 2005
■ **Rootzone:** 100% sand
■ **Turfgrass variety:** Kentucky bluegrass/perennial ryegrass. We custom blend our varieties to ensure we get the desired traits for high wear and quick germination.

■ **Overseed:** : During heavy use periods, August to October, we seed weekly at 5lbs/1000. Our coaching staff does a good job using the entire field, so we treat it all the same. However, we do seed heavier in the goalmouths, sidelines and team bench areas.

■ **Drainage:** Gridiron system consisting of 4" double-wall ADS laterals spaced 10' o.c. draining into an 8" collection header that feeds into a retention vault under the field.



WHY STMA SHOULD CONSIDER YOUR FIELD A WINNER?

Championship Field is home to the Seattle University Men & Women's varsity soccer programs. It serves as both the practice and game field. Our vicinity to Century Link Field also makes us an attractive venue for hosting training sessions and special events for MLS, NWSL, National teams, and occasionally the English Premier League; in 2011 Manchester United trained while on tour in the US.

Each year seems to have more scheduled (and unscheduled) events. Normally we have a month of uninterrupted down time to renovate and prepare the field for summer camps and the start of training for the fall soccer season, but this year has been by far the busiest. In early spring, we hosted Santos Laguna twice and the Seattle Reign FC, the professional women's team. In addition to varsity soccer, Championship Field hosted our University Rec's men's and women's club soccer tournaments. At the end of spring soccer, we had 2 weeks before the next scheduled camp, and rumors were going around we were a potential host site for the USMNT while in town for the World Cup qualifier in June. Unfortunately, the USMNT decided to train elsewhere, but our little pitch soon became very busy nonetheless.

The first two weeks of July, we hosted DC United 3 days; Panama and Martinique during the Gold Cup matches; Seattle Reign FC twice; and a Special Olympics event all while our men and women's teams were running summer camps. In total, over 14 days we hosted 17 events and logged 81 hours of use with minimal wear.

Our biggest challenge is squeezing in maintenance amongst events. Between the men and women's teams, our 86,000 square foot pitch is in use nearly every day of the week. That doesn't leave much time for maintenance, so scheduling and active communication with coaching and Athletics staff is critical to our success, as well as being creative with our work.

Aeration and frequent seeding are two of the keys to our success. Our goal is to be on the pitch each week with a slicer, solid-tines or pulling cores. With aeration, we put out 5,000 pounds of seed each season.

We are also pesticide-free and mostly organic. Following a sound IPM program and using biostimulants and bridged organic fertilizers, allow us to keep from applying synthetic chemical pesticides. We combat *Poa annua* by diligently hand cutting it out, and maintaining a healthy, dense stand of perennial rye/Kentucky bluegrass.

At the end of each season, I am always amazed how much use our field receives, and how well it stands up to the daily rigors of training and games by both teams. I know the major key to our success is the passion and dedication our team puts into creating a quality pitch for our university's varsity soccer program.

SportsTurf: What channels of communication do you use to reach coaches, administrators, and users of your facility? Any tips for communicating well?

Kevin White: We use various forms of communication, from formal boardroom style meetings to informal texting. During the season, we have standing weekly meetings with the coaches, athletic directors and game operations staff to ensure ev-

eryone is on the same page. At Seattle University, our department, Facilities Services, is separate from Athletics, so an open line of communication is vital. We also see the coaches every day on the field where we can chat about field use, the upcoming game, or whatever. If I need a quick response, I can send a text. We have established a great relationship with our coaches and athletics personnel, and it is not uncommon to receive texts with pics of fields when the coaches are on the road saying, "Hey, check this out!"

The best advice I have for communicating well is to be positive and present solutions, not problems. Be visible and approachable. Concerning coaches, remember that they are used to telling people what to do, and do not respond well to negativity—especially if it is on the field during training! We all have jobs to do, so we must work together on a compromise that is reasonable for us both. I like to arrange meetings on the field to discuss options. It is an environment we are both comfortable in, and it is easier to visualize what we are talking about.

ST: What are your specific responsibilities? What is your favorite task? Least favorite?

White: I am responsible for the development and execution of maintenance programs for our athletic fields, including budget and labor: Championship Field, a natural grass soccer game/training field, and Logan Field, a synthetic rec/intramural and varsity softball with skinned infield. Additionally, we maintain the landscapes associated with the fields and other campus facilities. Seattle University is dedicated to, and recognized for, its environmental stewardship. Our campus grounds are 100% organically managed and pesticide-free, while our athletic fields are pesticide-free and receive organic products where practicable. I feel honored and proud to work with the talented and dedicated individuals within our department, especially those on our Turf Team whom I work with on a daily basis: David "DC" Clausen, Senior Gardener; Peter Larson, Gardener/Field Technician; John Easley, Irrigation Specialist; and a revolving door of student employees. Without their support, and the support of our manager, Shannon Britton, this award would not have been possible.

Equipment list

- John Deere Pro Gator
- John Deere 4520 Tractor w/Loader
- Wiedenmann XP6 Aerator
- Wiedenmann Terra-Combi Slicer
- SmithCo V62 Sweeper
- Toro RM3100D mower
- Redexim Verti-seed
- TyCrop QP450 topdresser
- Tow-behind roller
- Tow-behind 150 gal. sprayer
- Graco FieldLazer Paint Sprayer
- Each year we borrow a First Products V60 verti-cutter from the Seattle Seahawks.

Field of the Year



What I enjoy most is providing our teams a high quality grass field. A lot of that enjoyment comes in the challenge of dealing with two teams training and playing games on one field, which receives 700 to 800 hours of use per year. We are always trying to improve through trying new methods, new equipment, or new products. We're not satisfied with 'good enough'! I also find a great deal of satisfaction in working with and mentoring Peter Larson on Championship Field. Peter handles the daily maintenance and doesn't have a background in turfgrass management, but has really excelled in learning and absorbing the concepts and methods we employ to create a quality field.

I enjoy everything I do, but wouldn't mind sitting in fewer meetings. I think most things can be dealt with through email.

ST: How did you get your start in turf management? What was your first job?

White: I began my career in turf management on the golf side in Southern California, and feel fortunate to have worked at some great places with some incredible people along the way. Initially, I wanted to become a golf course architect, but after some advice from the late Dr. Kent Kurtz, while we were waiting in line at an airport, I chose to pursue Turfgrass Management at Cal Poly Pomona. Kent was a tough professor, wise mentor, and good friend. He had a way of pushing you to your limit, but always had your best interest at heart. His impact on me will last my lifetime; he just had that kind of effect on people!

Seattle University is the first sports turf job I have had, and it has been a very rewarding one. It has also been a great place to transition from golf to sports turf with having a grass field, a synthetic field, and a skinned infield. I've learned a lot in a short time, and continue to learn every day.

ST: How do you balance your family life with work demands?

White: I find it to be much easier now than when I was an assistant superintendent. Working in golf was difficult, and it put

a big strain on our marriage. Sure, we have busy seasons and long days now, but taking time off isn't really a challenge. The team knows how to do everything, which makes all the difference.

ST: What changes if any are you considering or implementing for the winning field in 2014?

White: We constantly make little tweaks to our maintenance program trying to make it better, but this year we decided to try something a little bigger. Following the final spring soccer game on May 12, we began the process of fraze mowing, recycle dressing and seeding. We then had 7 weeks to grow it back in before the start of the 2014 soccer season, which culminates in November when we host both Western Athletic Conference women's and men's soccer tournaments. It is going to be a very busy season!

ST: How do you see the Sports Turf Manager's job changing in the future?

White: I think we are going to have to continue to be more open-minded about maintenance practices and push boundaries in terms of field use for our natural surfaces. I do not think natural grass gets enough credit in terms of how much wear it can tolerate. The new technology in equipment and products, and the new breeds of turfgrasses that are emerging now is very encouraging and exciting. I do believe synthetic surfaces have a place in this industry. However, in my opinion I see an unfortunate trend going on across the country. Personally, I feel that we are losing an appreciation for the art and science of growing a quality stand of grass for sport. I see the profession I'm deeply passionate about and wholly committed to changing. I just hope we can slow, or reverse the current trend, and continue to do what we got into this business to do...grow quality grass! ■

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