

# SportsField

## MANAGEMENT

March 2025

Vol. 41 No. 3

The Official Publication of the Sports Field Management Association

Accountability in the Workplace **9** | SFMA Conference Recap **18**  
Field Conversion at MetLife Stadium **28** | Plant Growth Regulators **36**



## Sea King Field Wins S&P Baseball FOY

Baseball coach/teacher, Kevin McCaffrey, and his students  
earn top prize for Corona Del Mar High School



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# Editor's Note



**John Kmitta**  
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Not much can beat Palm Springs in winter. The host site of the 2025 SFMA Conference & Exhibition welcomed attendees January 13-16 with warm weather, a trendy downtown filled with top-notch restaurants and boutique shops, and a modern convention center — all within comfortable walking distance to hotels and amenities.

SFMA did its part by presenting a wealth of first-class industry education, amazing networking opportunities and two days of the latest products and equipment on the trade show floor. Which is why this issue of *SportsField Management* magazine looks back at the 2025 SFMA Conference & Exhibition, and everything it had to offer.

For me, the conference is always a time to learn something new, see friends and colleagues from throughout the industry, and make new connections. This year was no different, as I met many new people, had some wonderful conversations and learned some new things.

A highlight for me was the Opening General Session presented by Alan Ferguson, Ewen Hodge and Weston Appelfeller from FIFA, along with Dr. John “Trey” Rogers from Michigan State University. The session showcased the planning and research efforts thus far for the FIFA World Club World Cup 2025 and FIFA World Cup 2026. I’m

excited to announce that *SportsField Management* magazine will share a series of articles about World Cup 2026 preparation throughout the coming year; and connections made during SFMA Conference make that type of editorial content possible.

I was also thrilled to present the 2024 *SportsField Management* Rising Star Awards during the conference. My thanks not only to our class of winners, but also to all those who showed up to support them — including members of our inaugural Rising Star class; SFMA President Adam Thoms, Ph.D.; Immediate Past President Sun Roesslein, CSFM; and Brandon Cox of Rising Star Awards sponsor STEC Equipment. Winners were presented with personalized awards, as well as plaques featuring their photos on the cover of *SportsField Management*. They also received swag bags courtesy of STEC Equipment. It has been great to see this awards program grow in just two short years, but most of all I enjoy meeting the amazing young professionals who are making their mark on the sports field management profession.

I’m excited for the ongoing impact of the conference as a result of the connections made, the stories shared, and the ideas generated; the magazine is better for it. I look forward to seeing you all next year in Fort Worth, Texas. **SFM**

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# President's Message



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**Adam Thoms, Ph.D.**

SFMA President

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With the growing season just around the corner, planning is in full swing for many of you. This might range from reviewing soil tests and developing a fertility plan to creating a fungicide rotation for those pesky turfgrass diseases or even when you will be performing cultivation on the fields for the upcoming year.

Planning is key for anyone looking to have a successful year, but that plan is only as good as the communication for carrying it out. We must be able to explain a management plan to other people in a language that they can understand. They also need to understand why they can't use the field for a few days, or that what we are doing will help make a stronger, more traffic-tolerant field.

Knowing to whom the plan should be communicated is also critical. Coaches, athletic directors, athletes and, in some cases, parents all deserve to know what is happening to their field. These communications can also help limit problems by simply asking them to move a drill.

The same goes for your staff. I often see young crew members left out of the loop regarding why something is being done. This is especially true if they are fertilizing or applying pesticides. While they should know what they are applying, it is critical for them to be able to explain how the application will

treat a specific issue — especially if they get stopped by the public. Those younger crew members will also use that knowledge in the future as they develop and advance their careers.

Similarly, spending time in your boss's office might not seem like an enjoyable experience, but laying out your plan for them will help them better understand the tools and time you need to make your job more successful. These steps should also help increase respect for what you do.

Finally, this time of year is a great time to plan for continuing education. Putting continuing education on the calendar now will increase your chances of actually attending those opportunities during the year. I encourage all of you to attend your local chapter events this year and make supporting those a priority — they often have great content. I also look forward to seeing you in Fort Worth next January for the annual SFMA Conference and Exhibition. Getting these events on your calendar and into the budget line now will remove the excuse later of how they snuck up on you. Spending a little time now filling out the calendar and planning will help you with success in the year to come. **SFM**

— Adam Thoms, Ph.D.



# Invest in Your Future: Join SFMA Today

The Sports Field Management Association (SFMA) is the recognized leader in championing the sports field industry and its professionals.



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■ **Sports field manager:** If you are primarily responsible for managing or maintaining sports fields.

■ **Sports field manager associate:** If you are primarily responsible for managing or maintaining a sports field(s) and your organization already has an SFMA sports field manager member employed.

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■ Opportunities for education.

■ Quick access to information and resources.

■ A monthly electronic newsletter that communicates association and industry information.

■ Access to the Member's Only section of *sportsfieldmanagement.org*, which has a real-time membership directory and hundreds of technical educational resources.

■ Access to Michigan State's Turfgrass Information File, a resource for up-to-date technical information.

■ Ability to enter your field in the nationally recognized Field of the Year awards program.

■ Opportunity to become a Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) and to have your facility certified as environmentally responsible.

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■ Purchase SFMA branded apparel.

■ *SportsField Management Magazine* each month.

■ The ability to apply for scholarships (students only).

■ Discounted exhibitor booth at the annual conference (commercial members only). **SFM**

**For more information, visit:**

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# The Evolution of Accountability

Accountability in the workplace has evolved over time, shaped by societal changes, technological advancements, and differing workforce expectations.

Gen Xers grew up in an era where personal responsibility was managed through direct consequences. Careless actions were met with reprimands, and the expectation was clear: own your actions and correct them. Leadership teams reinforced accountability, with supervisors maintaining strict oversight.

Millennials entered a workforce that gradually became collaborative, with emphasis on teamwork and shared responsibilities. As a result, the focus shifted from punitive measures to problem solving and continuous improvement. They were also introduced to digital tracking and performance metrics, which in some ways made accountability more transparent.

Gen Z, raised in an era of social media and instant feedback, are more accustomed to documenting their actions and receiving immediate responses. However, they thrive in an environment where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities rather than career-ending failures. The challenge in sports field management and similar industries is that traditional accountability measures may feel outdated or ineffective when applied to a younger workforce that values collaboration over hierarchy.

Sports field management relies on precision, efficiency and teamwork. Whether it is maintaining a pristine playing surface, operating heavy equipment, or ensuring safety protocols are followed, accountability plays a pivotal role. However, as generational perspectives on accountability differ, so does the way mistakes are managed.

When no one steps up to admit responsibility for damaged equipment, miscommunication or errors in field preparation, the consequences ripple outward. Productivity slows down, team morale suffers, and trust erodes. For older generations, this lack of personal ownership can be frustrating; for younger workers, traditional blame-and-punish methods can feel demotivating and counterproductive.

Accountability improves workplace culture. A strong culture of accountability fosters transparency, trust, and a sense of ownership among employees. It starts with well-defined expectations. Field managers should set clear,

documented guidelines on how tasks should be completed, how equipment should be handled, and what steps to take when errors occur.

In a multigenerational workforce, different employees will have different communication styles. Gen Xers may prefer direct, in-person discussions; while Millennials and Gen Z may be more comfortable with digital documentation or team-based discussions. Providing multiple communication channels ensures that accountability is a shared responsibility.

Instead of focusing solely on who is at fault when something goes wrong, shift the conversation toward solutions. For example, if a piece of equipment is damaged, use it as a learning opportunity. Was proper training provided? Could there be a better way to prevent future incidents?

Digital tracking systems, such as maintenance logs or work order software, can help keep employees accountable without relying on verbal admissions. If a machine was checked out by a specific individual, there's a record. Such systems create a culture of accountability that feels fair and objective rather than punitive.

One of the most effective ways to reinforce accountability is through recognition. Whether it's public acknowledgment in a team meeting or incentives for employees who consistently demonstrate responsibility, positive reinforcement can help create a culture where taking ownership is valued.

As generational perspectives on accountability evolve, so too must management strategies. By setting clear expectations, fostering open communication, shifting from blame to learning, utilizing technology, and recognizing responsible behavior, field managers can bridge the accountability gap and cultivate a workplace that is productive and cohesive. **SFM**



Alpha Jones, CSFM, is athletic field specialist at Duke University. He also serves on the SFMA Board of Directors as President-Elect. He can be reached at [morthangrass@gmail.com](mailto:morthangrass@gmail.com)





## SEA KING FIELD

CORONA DEL MAR HIGH SCHOOL,  
NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA

The Field of the Year Awards program is made possible by the support of sponsors  
Carolina Green Corp., Precision Laboratories, John Deere and World Class Athletics.



We have a very special program that helps to maintain Sea King Field. I started a turf program in 2021 and we have one class period dedicated to turf management. We call the students in the class the “CDM Turf Kings.” It is truly special that the students are learning how to maintain the baseball fields here at CDM. After safety training and being taught how to use the machines, the students are the ones helping to maintain the facility.

We have a very limited budget, and I believe we are making the most out of it. We use all the resources available to help maintain the two baseball fields on campus. Our annual budget dedicated to field maintenance is \$15,000. Our major projects include overseeding the fields every November. The process for our facility includes dethatching, seeding, topdressing and fertilizing. We stay off the fields for two months and start striping the fields in January. We do a minor summer rehab on our worn spots. We also must pay for paint, clay, conditioner and gas; deal with breakdowns; and service all our machines.

We are extremely lucky that our local golf course superintendent is supportive of our turf program. He does everything in his power to help us keep our costs down. He sends his mechanic to do our regular maintenance and helps us when we have breakdowns. We would not be able to function at the level we do without this partnership.

What makes Sea King Field so special is the fact that the students are the ones coming up with the ideas on how we should stripe the grass, paint the logos, and design the mound and home plate. I am a superstitious person and when we get to league play, we only change the mow pattern when we lose a series. We were lucky this past year and did not lose a league series. We used the landing strip mow pattern and then made minor adjustments as the class didn't want to use the same pattern all year long. The students research and show me pictures of patterns they want to mow. Then we come up with a plan on how to make it happen.

— Kevin McCaffrey, head baseball coach







**Level and category of submission:** Schools and Parks Baseball

**Field manager:** Kevin McCaffrey

**Title:** Head baseball coach / Turf Management class teacher

**Education:** BA from University of Arizona; Masters in Athletic Administration from Concordia University

**Experience:** I have been a baseball coach for 22 years (8 as head coach), and had to learn how to maintain a field through hands-on experience.

**Original construction:** 1980

**Turfgrass:** Bermuda base, overseeded with ryegrass

**Rootzone:** Sandy clay



**SportsField Management (SFM):** Congratulations on the Field of the Year win. What are you most proud of with this win?

**Kevin McCaffrey:** It is a huge honor to receive this award. There are so many beautiful facilities out there, and for ours to be chosen really means a lot. I am so happy for our turf class, as they help maintain the field. It is such a huge honor, and we were humbled with the announcement.

**SFM:** Please tell us a bit about your background and your experience in sports field management.

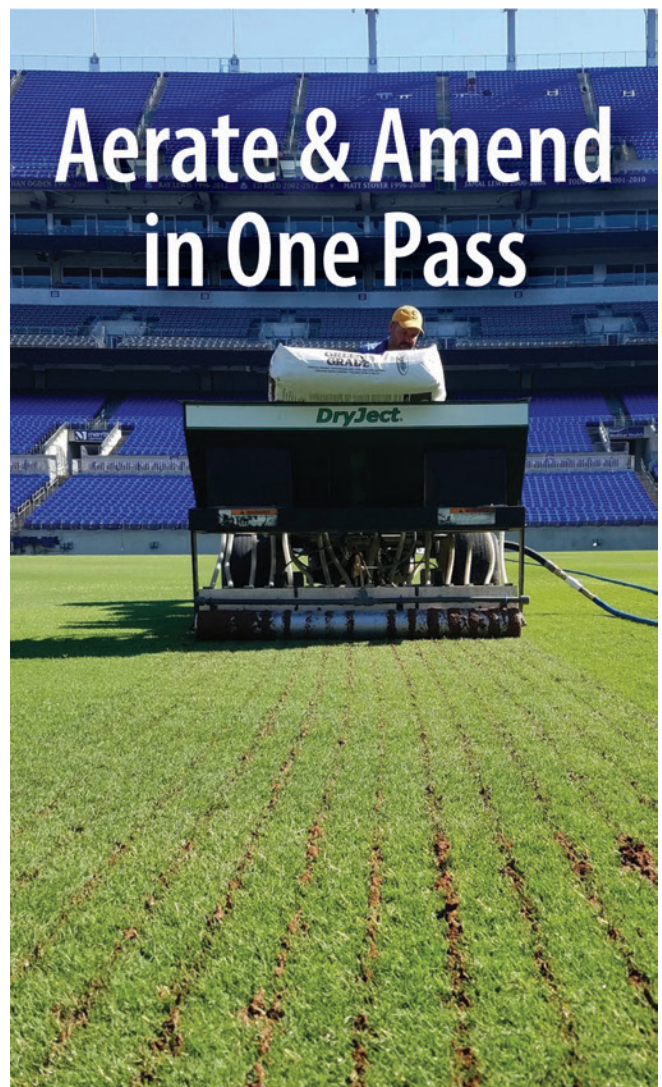
**McCaffrey:** As a high school coach, learning how to take care of a field has been through hands-on experience. I don't have any formal education in turf management. I have learned from other coaches, attended field days, developed relationships with turf professionals, and learned through things seen on social media. Coaching at a public school, we are always handcuffed by a lack of supplies and funding. You learn how to use what you have and make the best of it.

I truly believe that our athletes deserve to play on the best fields possible. When I took the head coaching job at Corona Del Mar High School in 2018, I hit the ground running in an attempt to make Sea King Field one of the best facilities in Orange County.

Before I took over, the program paid a company approximately \$50,000 per year to take care of the varsity field. As a result, the program didn't have any tools or machines. I presented the idea of taking care of the field in an attempt to save our program money. Our booster club agreed that paying an outside company to take care of our field was not the best use of our funds. Over the next two years, we were able to purchase the basic equipment needed to take care of the facility. I did all of the mowing and major jobs, and trained our players how to do the basic field jobs. We now have a pretty good fleet of mowers, tools and carts to help take care of our fields.

I follow as many turf industry professionals as possible on social media. I follow several East Coast schools that have high school turf management programs, and I contacted a few of the teachers of those programs to ask how they got started. It was so refreshing how supportive and helpful everyone was.

After several great conversations, I developed a presentation to add a turf management class at Corona Del Mar High School. I wanted to show our administration how impactful a turf class could be to our school and



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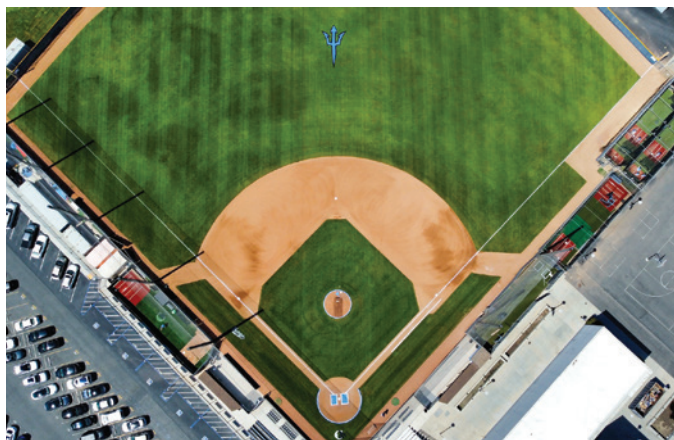
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students. I fully expected to be denied. After presenting it to our principal, he said he loved the idea and would do everything possible to help make the class a reality.

After several discussions with school district officials, I was told that they could make this class a reality if I got a CTE credential. I was ecstatic. Despite having a teaching credential in history and physical education, I found myself back in school taking classes to obtain the CTE credential. I got the credential and the CDM turf management class started in 2021. One period of turf management was added to my teaching schedule, and the turf class focuses on maintaining the varsity and freshman baseball fields.

**SFM:** What were the biggest challenges you have faced with the winning field, and how have you approached those challenges?

**McCaffrey:** Our biggest challenge is the lack of funding and proper equipment. We make the most of what we have, and feel as though we do a really good job with that. It costs a lot of money to maintain a field. Our baseball program funds everything. We need to think about what is most important for our facility and find ways to make that happen.

Personally, this past year has been the toughest year of my life. A large and very rare form of a brain tumor was discovered last July, and I went through a difficult brain surgery to remove the tumor in September 2023. I permanently lost all hearing in my right ear and was told the physical recovery process would take from eight months to two years to start feeling “normal” again. I had to take eight weeks off from school. During that time, the turf class didn’t get to use the machines as the district didn’t want a substitute teacher running the class.

When I came back to school, I was very limited in what I could do. I still suffered from equilibrium issues and daily headaches. Being back out on the field with the class was the best therapy for me, though. The students in the class were so understanding of what I went through. They went out of their way to make sure I was okay with everything we did. I was able to train them on all machines before the surgery. When I came back, we did a quick refresher on how all machines work and then the class was off and learning how to take care of the field. The fact that the training and machine time was so condensed this past year made their game day work that much more special. Students would regularly stay



after class to help finish painting or mowing to make sure everything got done on game days.

I am a little more than a year removed from the surgery; and although I still struggle with daily headaches, I am starting to feel like myself again. Losing the hearing in my right ear has been very difficult, but I am adapting, and my students are so supportive and understanding of my hearing issues.

This was an extremely difficult year for me personally, and the fact that we were able to maintain a beautiful facility and even add to its beauty this year was so refreshing to me. I am so proud of the work we did on our facility this past year to produce an amazing playing surface.

**SFM:** Can you share a little about your overall management approach to the winning field and what you feel have been the most important aspects to getting this field to an award-winning level?

**McCaffrey:** I have a passion for maintaining our two baseball fields on campus. I believe that the players in our program deserve to play on the best possible fields. With that comes a lot of hard work. I put in a ton of time and effort to make sure all the small details are correct.

Our turf management class — The Turf Kings — helps to maintain the facility. I teach the students the basics of maintaining a baseball field. The students learn how to use all of our different mowers. They learn how to paint the field. Not only do we paint the batter's box and foul lines, but we add several logos to our field to make it look more like a professional field.

The students wanted to add our trident logo to center field last year. I told them we could make that happen, but they would need to be the ones to do the work. I showed them how to create a template. We made a template and then painted it on the field. Everyone was impressed with how great it turned out. The students used several differ-



**A**t George M. Steinbrenner Field, the expert grounds crew led by Ritchie Anderson has mastered the use of Celebration® Bermudagrass, maintaining an exceptional playing surface for the New York Yankees' spring training and the Tampa Tarpons. The ballpark, which seats over 11,000 fans, is the largest spring training stadium in Florida and mirrors the dimensions of Yankee Stadium. Celebration® Bermudagrass, known for its durability and vibrant color, thrives under Anderson's team, providing a consistently lush and resilient field that withstands the demands of professional baseball training and games year-round.





## FIELD OF THE YEAR SCHOOLS AND PARKS BASEBALL

ent paint combinations with the new trident logo in center field throughout the year. They also painted our logos behind home plate and in front of both dugouts. The class also learns how to take care of the mound and home plate. They added paint around the home plate and mound areas and colored conditioner in the batter's box to help make these areas pop for big games.

This class is truly special. The students are outside working with their hands learning life skills. I wish there were more of these high school athletic turf classes offered throughout the nation.

The baseball players also all help take care of the field after every practice and game. It takes everyone to maintain the fields and keep them at a high standard.

I would also like to thank my wife and daughter. I feel as though my wife, Brooke, is part of the crew at times. She allows me to spend time at the field getting it ready for our players, as she knows it is a passion of mine. She has come out to help me mow on the weekends, and those days are special. My daughter also loves going to the field with dad and riding on the mower with me. These are memories I will never forget.

**SFM:** Can you share a bit of insight into what the Field of the Year application process was like for you, as well as any tips you might have for other sports field managers?

**McCaffrey:** The field of the year application process makes you think back to some of the neat things you accomplished the past year. It is a chance for you to show your passion in writing.

Tips for other managers: Give yourself plenty of time to complete the application process. Take the time to go back and look things up. Go through all of your pictures to present the best from that year. **SFM**





## JOHN MASCARO'S PHOTO QUIZ



### CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS TURFGRASS PROBLEM?

**PROBLEM:**

Magnificent monostand of goosegrass through the center third of the field

**TURFGRASS AREA:**

Parks and rec football field

**LOCATION:**

Hyattsville, Maryland

**TURFGRASS VARIETY:**

Fescue/bluegrass/ryegrass

*Answer on page 33*

*John Mascaro is president of Turf-Tec International*

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# SFMA Conference & Exhibition

**THE 36TH SFMA CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION** was held at the Palm Springs Convention Center in Palm Springs, California, January 13-16, 2025. This year's theme was "Oasis of Knowledge," and the sports field management industry's premier event featured seven education tracks, a full trade show with more than 160 exhibiting companies, networking opportunities, opening general session, SAFE fundraisers, the SFMA Student Challenge, Seminar on Wheels, and more.

## **VOLUNTEER FIELD REBUILD**

Project EverGreen, members of the Sports Field Management Association (SFMA) and the City of Palm Spring Parks and Recreation Department teamed up on January 13 at Demuth Park in Palm Springs, California, to give the baseball fields at the city's largest and most frequently used park a \$40,000 makeover.

More than 75 professional volunteers joined forces to deliver a professionally renovated baseball field for aspiring youth athletes and neighborhood residents. More than 130,000 square feet of turfgrass and infield playing surfaces were renovated. In less than four hours, the ballfield was completely transformed, showcasing the power of collaboration and expertise.

"Transformations like these aren't achieved by one person or group alone; it takes a community effort," said Cindy Code, executive director of Project EverGreen. "In Palm Springs, we've seen firsthand how well-maintained athletic fields and recreation spaces can strengthen the social fabric, offering a safe and welcoming environment for people to compete, exercise and connect outdoors."

Project EverGreen works with under-resourced communities to renovate, maintain and make more accessible healthy playing fields, as well as to improve the environmental health of public green spaces.

Nicholas Gonzalez, director of parks and recreation for the City of Palm Springs, said the city is beyond grateful.

"I want to thank Project EverGreen and the Sports Field Management Association, who gave their time, talent and resources to transform our park," said Gonzalez. "This gift is meaningful to our community who will continue to enjoy this space and create lasting memories with family and friends."

The Demuth Park project is the fifth collaboration between SFMA and Project EverGreen:

"It has become an annual tradition for our members to help rejuvenate a sports field in the community hosting our SFMA conference and we're excited to be a part of this year's transformative project at Demuth Park," said SFMA Immediate Past President, Sun Roesslein, CSFM. "Our team of dedicated sports field managers brings unparalleled expertise to this project, and we're honored to contribute our skills to give back to the Palm Springs community."

In-kind donors to the project include: Arborjet | Ecologel, Barenbrug, Bulldog Field Equipment, Ecologel, Great Western Sports Field, Hunter Industries, Pioneer Products, Profile Products, ProPeat, Rain Bird, Site One, Sports Field Solutions and West Coast Turf.



Photo provided by  
Project EverGreen



## OPENING GENERAL SESSION

The Opening General Session, titled “Countdown to the World Cup 2026 — Behind-the-Scenes Look at Research and Preparation to Pull Off the World’s Largest Tournament” was presented by Alan Ferguson, senior pitch management manager for FIFA; Professor John “Trey” Rogers III, Ph.D. from Michigan State University; Ewen Hodge, senior pitch infrastructure manager, FIFA26 US Inc.; and Weston Appelfeller, senior manager, training pitch management at FIFA.

To successfully stage the world’s biggest sporting event, FIFA funded a collaborative research and development effort between Michigan State University and the University of Tennessee to prepare pitches for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The Opening General Session offered an in-depth overview of the research, with a focus on the challenges and progress in developing temporary playing surfaces for eight of the 16 stadiums. It also highlighted results from indoor testing conducted for the five domed venues and explored how the research has been applied to real-world scenarios.

## F.I.E.L.D. FORUM

The F.I.E.L.D. Forum (Fostering Inclusion, Equity, Leadership and Diversity) was held January 16. Tara Furiani of Not the HR Lady presented “Game On: Leveling the Playing Field in Sports Field Management.”

Attendees gained insight into the present state of diversity in the sports field management industry, focusing on the underrepresentation of women and marginalized groups, and how this impacts team dynamics, innovation and industry growth. They learned strategies for promoting equity through shifts in language, team roles and behavior. Attendees also discovered effective ways to attract diverse talent from high schools and colleges, fostering early inclusion through mentorship programs, internships and partnerships with educational institutions.



Photo by John Kmitta



Photo by Mark Skalny

## SFMA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The 2025 SFMA Board of Directors officially took office at the Annual Meeting. The 2025 SFMA Board of Directors is as follows:

### OFFICERS

- **President:** Adam Thoms, Ph.D.
- **Immediate Past President:** Sun Roesslein, CSFM
- **President Elect:** Alpha Jones, CSFM
- **Secretary-Treasurer:** Casey Carrick, CSFM
- **Vice President Commercial:** Erin Wilder





Photos by Mark Skalny

## DIRECTORS

- **Academic:** Chase Straw, Ph.D.
- **At-Large (elected):** Weston Floyd, CSFM
- **At-Large (appointed):** Lee Van Meeteren
- **Commercial:** Matthew Duncan, CSFM
- **Higher Education:** Jason DeMink, CSFM
- **Parks and Recreation:** Zack Holm, CSFM
- **Professional Facilities:** Dan Farnes
- **Schools K-12:** Jake Mays

## STUDENT CHALLENGE

### SFMA STUDENT CHALLENGE

The SFMA Student Challenge featured students from 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities throughout the country competing in an exam that challenges knowledge in the sports field management industry. The winning teams received a cash award, a plaque and medallions for each team member. The prize money benefits the institution's turfgrass program and creates opportunities for students pursuing a career in sports field management.

### 2-YEAR WINNING TEAMS

- **1st place:** Mt. San Antonio Team 407 — Robyn Tom, Kevin Magana, Edward Kardish and Carlos Figueroa
- **2nd place:** Mt. San Antonio Team 307 — Nicholas Elliott, Leonardo Colon-Guembes, Jessie Lerma and Mayra Rubio
- **3rd place:** Mt. San Antonio Team 108 — Andreas Sanchez, Kevin Pulido, Mandy Flaig Bernard and Kenneth Rodriguez



### 4-YEAR WINNING TEAMS

- **1st place:** Penn State Team 103 — Aidan Huedepohl, Joseph Lofland, Ryan Daub and Kyler McGowan
- **2nd place:** Penn State Team 403 — Benjamin Wagner, Carter Marshall, Ian Bowes and Wilson Kretz
- **3rd place:** Purdue Team 204 — Broden Piel, Hayden Fick, Hayden Wilson and Dylan Jake Tower

The SFMA Student Challenge is presented in partnership with the SAFE Foundation, founding partner Hunter Industries, and supporting sponsor Ewing.

### SAFE

SFMA's charity, the SAFE Foundation, once again held activities to raise funds for scholarships, education, outreach and research initiatives.



### SAFE GOLF TOURNAMENT

The SAFE Golf Tournament was held January 13 at Classic Club Golf Course in Palm Desert, California. The winning team shot a 60:

- Chris Ball, CSFM
- Casey Carrick, CSFM
- Alan Dungey, CSFM
- Brant Williams

### SAFE NIGHT OF BOWLING

Teams of five came together for the SAFE Night of Bowling and a chance to compete for prizes. The event was held at Yucca Bowl. The top winner was Sawyer Neuhaus with a score of 210. The winning team was Mike McDonald, CSFM; Greg Brodd; Ben Boeding, CSFM; Roger Weinbrenner, CSFM; and Nick Wilz.

### LIVE AUCTION

The SAFE Foundation Live Auction allowed attendees to bid on sports field management equipment and products, highly desired technology, and sports memorabilia.

### SAFE GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

- **Leo Goertz Membership Grant Awardee (sponsored by Pioneer Athletics)** — Nathan James, Raleigh County Parks and Rec Authority
- **Darian Daily Legacy Scholarship** — Paige Wildt, Southeast Missouri State University
- **Dr. James Watson Graduate Scholarship Winner (sponsored by Toro)** — Conlan Burbrink, University of Tennessee
- **Dr. James Watson Undergraduate Scholarship Winners (sponsored by Toro)** — Mayra Rubio, Mt. San Antonio College and Tristin Ziola, Michigan State University



Photo by Mark Skalny

- **Dr. Fred Grau Scholarship** — Aidan Hackney, Ohio State University

- **Paul Zwaska Scholarship (presented by Beacon Athletics)** — Keyshell Cole Hodgson, Iowa State University

- **SAFE Graduate Scholarship Winner** — Ivan Navarrete, University of Tennessee

- **SAFE Undergraduate Scholarship Winner** — Justin Spencer, Mississippi State University

### AWARDS BANQUET

#### FOUNDERS AWARD WINNERS

SFMA's highest honors, the four Founders Awards, recognize those members who have made significant contributions to SFMA and to the profession. This year's SFMA Founders Award winners are as follows:

- **Dick Ericson Award – Larry DiVito, CSFM, Minnesota Twins**

The Dick Ericson Award recognizes dedication, innovation and excellence in sports field management.

Larry DiVito was recognized for his unwavering commitment to excellence and an incredible work ethic. Throughout a decades-spanning career, he has worked more than 2,100 consecutive professional baseball games — a feat that speaks to his dedication and resilience.

In addition, DiVito has mastered the science of agronomy, balancing sustainability with performance. Under his leadership, his facility earned SFMA's Environmental Facility Certification and became the first sports franchise in the world to earn LEED Gold Certification for operations and maintenance.

Beyond the field, DiVito is a mentor and leader. His calm demeanor under pressure and ability to foster a collaborative and supportive work environment have shaped the careers of countless groundskeepers, many of whom have gone on to lead their own facilities. DiVito's influence extends beyond his own field, impacting entire communities through field rebuild projects and providing



fundraising opportunities to engage and inspire the next generation of turfgrass professionals.

■ **Dr. William H. Daniel Award – Brad Park, Rutgers University**

The Dr. William H. Daniel Award celebrates individuals who have made significant contributions to the sports field management industry through their dedication to research, teaching or extension.

Brad Park embodies the spirit of this award, and has spent more than two decades work-

ing to make athletic fields safer and more sustainable. Park's career has been dedicated to conducting practical, impactful research — often focusing on topics that others might overlook due to challenges in funding or implementation.

From traffic stress tolerance studies to projects on low-input turfgrasses, Park's work has provided invaluable insights to athletic field managers across the Mid-Atlantic region and beyond. Park's hands-on approach involves testing turfgrass under real-world conditions, ensuring that the findings are both practical and applicable.

Park is well-known for his expertise in cool-season turfgrass species and cultural practices, and is a trusted resource for practitioners seeking advice on integrated pest management, species selection, and sustainable management practices. Park is also a tireless volunteer, serving on numerous SFMA committees.

■ **George Toma Golden Rake Award – Nick McKenna, CSFM, Texas A&M Athletics**

The George Toma Golden Rake Award celebrates those who go above and beyond emphasizing the importance of the entire crew in effective sports field management, embodying the relentless work ethic and passion for excellence that George himself demonstrated throughout his career.

Nick McKenna, CSFM, has demonstrated an un-

wavering dedication to improving athletic fields and mentoring the next generation of field managers. In addition to his technical expertise, McKenna has been a mentor, connector and friend to many in the industry.

From his early days as a groundskeeper to becoming the assistant athletic field manager at one of the nation's top athletic programs, McKenna has consistently demonstrated an attention to detail and a commitment to excellence.

His impact has also been felt through his volunteer work and service to SFMA. He served as president, led the organization through a major rebranding initiative and later returned to the board during a critical time of need. McKenna's selflessness, integrity, and dedication to advancing the profession are truly inspiring.

■ **Harry C. Gill Founders Award – Paula Sliefert, The Toro Company**

The Harry C. Gill Award celebrates extraordinary leadership, dedication and a commitment to the betterment of the profession.

Paula Sliefert exemplifies these qualities and has been a beacon of professionalism and a tireless advocate for sports field managers. Her efforts to create meaningful connections and foster growth have left an indelible mark on the sports field management community.

Throughout her career, Sliefert has served on countless boards within the green industry, strengthening relationships between organizations such as PGMS and NRPA, and bringing invaluable insights back to SFMA. Her thoughtful approach to leadership, both in and out of the boardroom, ensures decisions are made with a focus on long-term impact and strategic alignment.

Sliefert has also been a passionate champion for diversity, inclusion and equity within sports field management. Her efforts to grow initiatives like Women in Turf and to create a welcoming environment for all conference attendees highlight her deep commitment to making this industry a place where everyone can thrive.







Photos by Mark Skalny

### FIELD OF THE YEAR WINNERS

The 2024 SFMA Field of the Year Award winners are as follows:

#### PROFESSIONAL

■ **Baseball** — Hammons Field, Springfield Cardinals, Springfield, Missouri, Nathan Strait and Derek Edwards

■ **Soccer** — Louisville City FC/Racing Louisville, Lynn Family Stadium, Louisville, Kentucky, Aaron Fink

#### COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY

■ **Baseball** — Georgia Southern University, J.J. Clements Stadium, Statesboro, Georgia, Joe Stumpo

■ **Football** — Arizona State University, Mountain American Stadium, Tempe, Arizona, Josh Lenz

■ **Soccer** — Mississippi State University, MSU Soccer Field, Starkville, Mississippi, Brandon Hardin

■ **Softball** — University of Georgia Athletic Association, Jack Turner Softball Stadium, Athens, Georgia, Brandi "BJ" Thomas

#### SCHOOLS AND PARKS

■ **Baseball** — Corona Del Mar High School, Sea King Field, Newport Beach, California, Kevin McCaffrey

■ **Football** — The Westminster Schools, Fritz-Orr Field at Thompson Stadium, Atlanta, Georgia, Jake Mays

■ **Soccer** — City of Surprise, The Fields at Countryside, Surprise, Arizona, Steve Hamilton, CSFM

■ **Softball** — Ogden School District, Ben Lomond Scots Softball Field, Ogden, Utah, Brett Barker

### CSFM CLASS OF 2024

The following sports field managers earned their CSFM status in 2024: Christopher Gibbs, CSFM; Jonathan Waszak, CSFM; Brett Embler, CSFM; Matthew Krebsbach, CSFM; Jeffrey Foor, CSFM; Eric Harshman, CSFM; and Cole Walker, CSFM.



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## INNOVATIVE AWARD WINNERS

The SFMA Innovative Award is given to one or more exhibitors whose innovation has made the sports field manager more effective or the playing surface safer. The 2025 winning products were as follows:

### ■ Hunter Wireless Valve Link (WVL)

Running wire from the controller to field valves can be time-consuming, labor-intensive and expensive. The Hunter Wireless Valve Link (WVL) system uses LoRa Technology so you can easily connect valves without running additional wires or cutting into hardscape. It features simple, wire-free connections, works with Hunter ICC2 and HCC controllers, and is compatible with Centralus and Hydrowise Software. The WVL adds up to 54 valves (+P/MV) up to 2,000 feet line-of-sight or more with a repeater. License-free LoRa Technology enables wireless communication directly to the valve box — no copper field wiring required. WVL combines with conventional ICM or two-wire EZDS modules for ultimate flexibility.

### ■ Wiedenmann STrac 720 with ST 170 flex fraise mowing head

The STrac 720 with the ST 170 flex fraise mowing head is a pedestrian fraise mower that will fraise mow the infield and outfield lips of a baseball field, creating a safer playing surface. By eliminating these lips, you are removing a tripping hazard by leveling the surface and also reducing the unpredictable bounce of a baseball that can occur when the ball is hit into the lip. The transition zone(s) between the infield and outfield is smooth and level due to the application from the STrac 720 with the ST 170 flex fraise mowing head. The STrac 720 is a multipurpose machine with other heads that can be quickly swapped out. Other heads include a verticutting head, coring head, sod cutting head, sand fill head and several seeder heads.

## PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL SPORTS TURF MANAGERS SYMPOSIUM

The Professional Baseball Sports Turf Managers Symposium was held January 15-16 in conjunction with the 2025 SFMA Conference and Exhibition in Palm Springs, California.

The annual symposium provides valuable insights into many aspects of professional development



and groundskeeping, as well as the opportunity to develop relationships.

More than 85 groundskeepers plus sponsors attended the 2025 symposium. Presentations were geared toward Minor League Baseball and professional baseball groundskeepers, and session topics included the following:

- Review and clarification of PDL guidelines and new rules for the 2025 season — presented by MLB representatives via Zoom.
- Maintaining Sand-Based Fields — presented by Dr. Bryan Hopkins, BYU.
- Work/Life Balance — presented by Joey Stevenson, Indianapolis Indians.
- Infield Skin Maintenance — presented by Matt Parrott, Charlotte Knights.
- Umpire Relations — Trevor Danegger, AAA Umpire.

Ewing Outdoor Solutions and Sygenta served as presenting sponsors for the 2025 symposium. Sponsor partners included DuraEdge Engineered Soils, Beacon Athletics, Mountain View Seeds/MVP Genetics, Hunter Industries and SiteOne Sports Fields.

The symposium leadership team included Marcus Campbell, St. Paul Saints; Dan Douglas, Reading Fightin' Phils; Andy Gossel, Lehigh Valley IronPigs; Ben Hartman, Wichita Storm Surge; Mitch Hooten, West Michigan White Caps; Morgan Hunter, Quad City River Bandits; Jeff Jackson, Oklahoma City Comets; Kyle Leppelmeier, Toledo MudHens; Nick Rozdilski, Round Rock Express; Tim Siegel, Kannapolis Cannon Ballers; and Keith Winter, Fort Wayne TinCaps.

(Left to right): John Kmitta; Andy Hebrard; Colt Boxler; Adam Thoms, Ph.D.; Danny Losito, CSFM; Morgan Hunter; Jake Mays and Sun Roesslein, CSFM.



### RISING STAR AWARD WINNERS RECOGNIZED

SportsField Management magazine recognized the 2024 Rising Star Award winners on Thursday, January 16 during the SFMA Conference and Exhibition. SportsField Management magazine associate publisher and editorial brand director, John Kmitta, presented the winners with their awards at the SportsField Management booth on the exhibit hall floor. Winners also received plaques with personalized magazine covers recognizing their achievement.

SFMA President Adam Thoms, Ph.D., and Immediate Past President Sun Roesslein, CSFM, were on hand to recognize the winners, as was Brandon Cox of Rising Star Awards sponsor STEC Equipment. SFMA attendees — including past Rising Star Award winners — showed their support

for the 2024 class of Rising Stars.

Winners were as follows:

- Colt Boxler
- Andy Hebrard
- Morgan Hunter
- Danny Losito, CSFM
- Jake Mays **SFM**



THE RISING STAR AWARDS  
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2025 Rising Star Awards at  
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## GOLD



## SILVER





# Quick



## *Inside the field conversion process at MetLife Stadium — home of the New York Giants and New York Jets*

By Tyler Morris, CSFM

Each year in May, the National Football League (NFL) announces the specific dates for each game to be played during the upcoming season. As sports field manager at MetLife Stadium — home of the New York Giants and New York Jets — this announcement begins a planning phase for what maintenance the playing surface will need. With the unique challenge of hosting two clubs, this means that MetLife Stadium staff and I maintain the surface for 20 games a year.

Each season can bring a new set of challenges to overcome, and the 2024 season was unlike any other. Of the 20 games (22 when we include two colleges games) we had four NFL weeks in which we hosted both teams. Those weeks present the most challenges because the standard for both teams remains the same — fully painted endzones, a new midfield logo and a complete building changeover. In

those situations, our team must move quickly to ensure a successful changeover.

For example, the New York Jets hosted the Houston Texans on October 31, and less than 72 hours later, on November 3, the New York Giants hosted the Washington Commanders. The changeover process began not long after the last whistle sounded on the first game and the teams cleared the field. Around midnight on November 1, our field team began scrubbing the field; and the process of driving scrubber machines over the field lasted approximately three hours. Our painters and laborers then reported to the stadium at 7 a.m. on November 1 to complete field painting, which entails preparing the stencils on the field, measuring and ensuring the accuracy of placement, painting all the dots throughout the logo, and then fully painting each endzone with the color scheme and logos requested for that week. In this instance, the Giants requested a three-color endzone to pay homage



All photos by Tyler Morris, CSFM

# Change



to their legacy field layout from the 1990s. That logo takes a bit longer; but in good conditions with three painters, the painting process took only eight hours to complete.

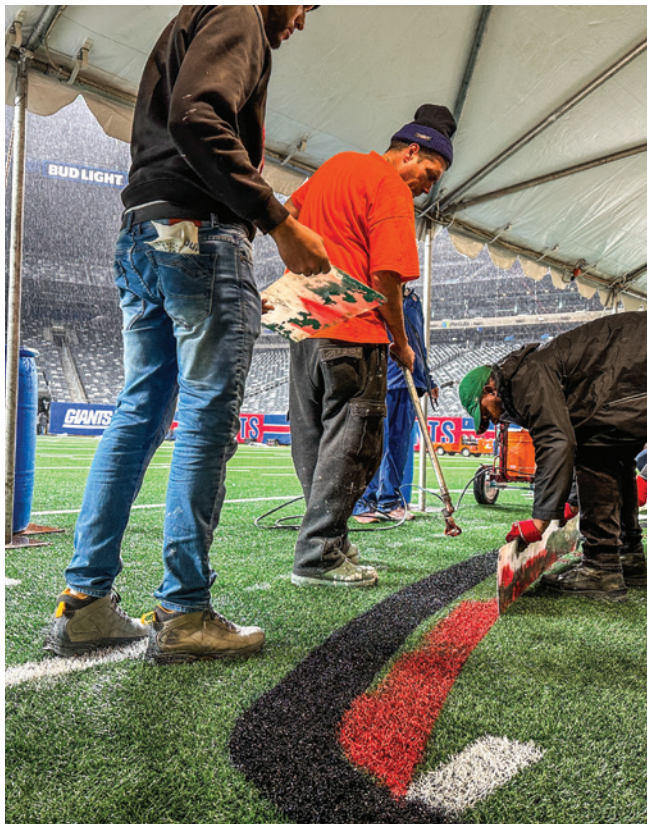
The team is a mix of union and nonunion members with two painters and 12 laborers. When the stadium switched from turf replacement to painting the end zones, our painters hit the ground running and learned how to operate the paint machines. Everyone learned how to use both the machines and aerosol. The laborers pull string and hold boards for straight lines, and are indispensable to the job. Concurrently with the people completing the on-field swap, the stadium changeover is happening as well, with a total of 35 to 40 people completing that monumental task in less than 16 hours from the end of the game the night before.

We are often asked what happens when conditions are not favorable and we are dealing with high winds, rain, snow, ice, etc. But there is no room for any part of the building to not be changed. Due to the high standards both club's ownership groups have for successful changeovers, the field staff must follow suit. Specifically in rain events, our team works closely with meteorologists to plan the best windows to remove and repaint the field.

In situations when two games are on back-to-back days (which has occurred five times in the last two seasons) our team will first work diligently to remove the existing field logos to make way for a 40-by-170-foot tent to be built over each end zone, and a 40-by-40-foot tent to be erected over the midfield logo. Once the tents are in place, our team lays out the stencils under the tent, then completes the painting process completely protected from the elements. We can also utilize tent sides to protect the painted product from rain and wind.

For games later in the season, our stadium can also be hit with cold weather, snow and ice. In those circumstances, it is unsafe to construct tents as they may not be able to hold the weight of the snow, and the conditions are typically not safe for the tents to be built. In those situations, our team deploys field tarps that cover the entire field to ensure any snow that falls is caught by the tarps. Once the snow has eased, we shovel/plow any accumulation off the tarps to provide enough room to peel back the tarps in the painted areas and complete the paint removal or new painting as needed. If there is potential for more inclement weather following the repainting, we will take steps to protect the

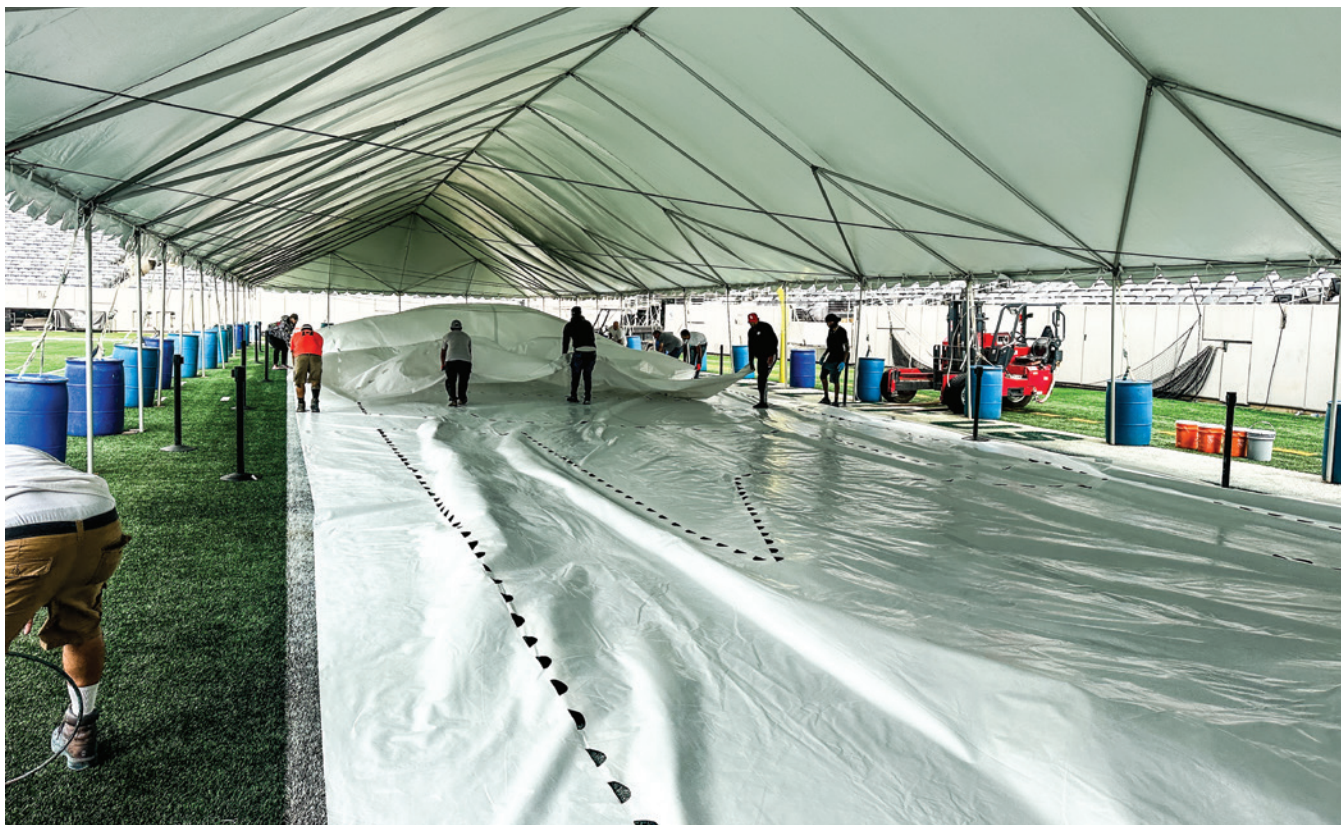




painted product. This could be anything from drying the paint for a few hours with blowers then covering with tarps to covering the paint with an EnkaMat that prevents the tarp from wiping away any wet paint. All measures are taken to ensure the time spent painting is not wasted.

Although plans can be made and followed completely, we occasionally need to find ways to overcome unforeseen challenges. For our last Giants game of the 2024 season against the Indianapolis Colts, I arrived at the stadium at 6 a.m. to see the midfield logo and endzones slightly washed away from rain we received over the weekend. This was completely unexpected, but my team was able to move into swift action to remedy the problem. In this case, we used synthetic turf aerosol paint to ensure the paint would dry and be safe for players without fear of any paint transfer onto clothing. This was the first time this situation had ever surfaced; however, quick thinking by all members of our team made the fix that much easier, and ensured that the field was ready for handover to the teams at the start of warmups around 10:30 a.m.

Without each part of the team working in harmony, we could not accomplish the things that we do. In September 2023, we hosted two concerts on a Thursday and Friday before







rolling into two NFL games to open the season on Sunday and Monday. These changeover situations take even more careful planning and execution from multiple groups. We typically divide and conquer to ensure that we can accomplish everything. For example, as the concert flooring was removed, and as soon as the endzones and other paintable areas were uncovered, our painters jumped into action to make sure any touchups were completed with enough time to dry before warmups. For this specific changeover, the concert setups were completely removed by Saturday around 6 p.m.; the concert decking was removed overnight until completion around 2 a.m. Sunday; and the full field cleaned, repainted and set up for the NFL game by 10 a.m. Sunday.

With special attention to all the details and steps of the process, we ensured that not only were our staff members

on site at the correct times, but that our subcontractors who complete the turf cleaning were on site at the right time as well. Following the game on Sunday night we rolled right into preparing for a second game in the same number of days, bringing its own set of challenges as we dealt with rain and high winds trying to prepare for the Jets home opener.

Overall, our stadium changeovers have been successful, and I attribute that to my team's willingness to work in all conditions and work together for one common goal. Without the team of people around me at MetLife Stadium, we could not accomplish the tight back-to-back events we do. **SFM**

*Tyler Morris, CSFM, is sports field manager, facility operations and events, MetLife Stadium, East Rutherford, New Jersey.*



# Spreaders and Sprayers



## BOBCAT SPREADER ATTACHMENTS

Bobcat's spreader attachments help operators efficiently spread sand and salt for winter snow and ice removal. Bobcat's HS8 spreader attachment model is quick-tach mounted and compatible with select compact track loaders, skid-steer loaders, telehandlers and Toolcat utility work machines. Cargo-box-mounted spreaders are available for Bobcat utility vehicles (SP9 attachment model) and Toolcat machines (SP13 attachment model). The HS8 spreader disperses material from 18 to 28 feet. Operators can use the 8-cubic foot-hopper as a bucket, filling the spreader from a pile. This allows for quick and efficient reloading of the spreading material into the hopper for large parking lot or road coverage jobs. SP9 and SP13 spreaders can be adjusted to disperse material from 5 to 30 feet. The hopper is constructed of stainless steel and has smooth and angled walls to maximize material flow.

## CAMPEY SPEEDRESSER

The Campey Speedresser is available with 18m or 24m spreading widths and is designed to handle all topdressing material. The unique aspect of the Speedresser is the four floatation tires on a pivoting axle that minimize the



risk of turf damage and compaction. This feature is especially important when working on a preexisting surface, but is equally important during renovations. Ideal for golf courses and sports fields, the Speedresser requires a tractor of at least 30 horsepower, and is driven hydraulically from the tractor via an agitator and twin rollers. The high work rate of the machine enables the spreading of dressings up to a depth of 2mm-75mm in one pass.



## GKB SANDSPREADER FROM STEC EQUIPMENT

The GKB Sandspreader, available from STEC Equipment, applies a vast variety of materials across your surface, which is necessary during field construction and maintenance. This allows efficient evaporation of excess water, oxygenation of the soil, and less organic matter buildup on the top layer. With this machine you can save time, spread more, and solidify healthy turf. The shape and design of

the hopper ensure efficient operation and a clear view along the machine. The sand is transported to a metering gate by means of a wide, large-capacity conveyor belt, which is also available as a hydraulically operated metering gate. The spreading discs are adjustable on multiple points, allowing the Sandspreader to provide perfect sand distribution.

## FERRIS VENTURE X

The new Venture X represents a complete redesign of Ferris' existing Venture model with features to enhance operations, ease of use, maintenance and operator comfort. Venture X features a corrosion-resistant suspension system, stainless-steel platform and comfort knee pads. The speedometer ensures accurate spraying/spreading and a five-gallon fuel tank provides longer intervals between refueling. Venture X is powered by a Vanguard 18-hp. engine. Venture X has proven toolless push-to-connect hoses, an industry first for stand-on spreader-sprayers. In addition, the sump of the tank has been moved outboard of the frame rail, which, combined with the push-to-connect hoses, makes for easy tank removal and provides ready access to the engine for maintenance.



**Continued on  
page 34**



## JOHN MASCARO'S PHOTO QUIZ



### ANSWER

*From page 17*

This fescue, bluegrass and ryegrass football field had a magnificent monostand of goosegrass through the center third of the field due to field renovation delays. These renovations were planned to occur immediately following the installation of a new irrigation system. The county's in-house team cut sod out of the center third of the field in preparation for new sod to be installed while they waited for the contractor to finish installing the irrigation system. The pump assembly ended up being on back order for more than a month, and the resulting wait time allowed the field to develop this crop. Since goosegrass is a perennial grassy weed and can germinate and spread from seeds, underground root structures and rhizomes, it's hard to pinpoint exactly where this banner crop came from. Once the irrigation was up and running, the area was treated with a non-selective herbicide and the area prepared and finally sodded. This is an interesting example of "what is really down there" in the seed bank!

**Photo submitted by Shawn Beaumont, CPRP, recreation/maintenance coordinator at Prince George's County in Hyattsville, Maryland.**

*John Mascaro is president of Turf-Tec International*

If you would like to submit a photograph for John Mascaro's Photo Quiz, please send a high-resolution digital photo to John Mascaro via email at [john@turf-tec.com](mailto:john@turf-tec.com). If your photograph is selected, you will receive full credit. All photos submitted will become property of *SportsField Management* magazine and the Sports Field Management Association.

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### JOHN DEERE HD200 SELECTSPRAY

The John Deere HD200 SelectSpray sprayer is a high-performance 200-gallon sprayer designed for turf management. It offers both diaphragm and centrifugal pump options, with the diaphragm pump delivering up to 30.1 gallons per minute and 290 psi, ideal for thick fluids such as turf paint; and the centrifugal pump providing up to 105 gallons per minute and 95 psi for general spraying. The sprayer features an automatic rate controller that integrates with speed sensors, flow meters and digital pressure sensors to ensure precise and consistent application rates. A low center of gravity enhances stability, and the polyethylene tank includes a quick-fill anti-siphon system and a removable basket strainer for easy maintenance. The HD200 SelectSpray offers durable 18-foot or convertible 15/21-foot boom options with a breakaway system to protect against obstacles.

### LESCO 500 SPREADER-SPRAYER

Spreader-sprayers like the LESCO 500 from SiteOne help sports field managers quickly and effectively apply both granular solids and liquids across large areas, saving time and labor. The LESCO 500's



tank holds up to 60 gallons of liquid and its adjustable spray nozzles cover a swath up to 12 feet wide. The pivoting front end keeps the wheels firmly in contact with the ground and helps the nozzles maintain a consistent height for even application. A thumb-activated spray system eliminates the need for a foot activation pedal. The hopper holds up to 60 pounds of granular material, and the shaker prevents clogs and dust build up. Effortless to drive, the LESCO 500 has easy-to-access filters, hose connections and parts for simple maintenance.



### MARTIN LISHMAN MICRO-SPRAY

The Martin Lishman Micro-Spray, available from Campey, features a narrow footprint that allows it to fit through most gateways and passageways to tackle hard-to-reach spraying areas. With a 120-liter tank, the option of a 2.5m six-nozzle or 3.5m eight-nozzle three-section folding boom and the perfect combination of power, control and responsive handling, the Micro-Spray is suited to all types of sports grounds, golf courses and landscaping work. The comprehensive yet easy-to-use control box gives the operator more control over the sprayer with changeable motor direction to either walk behind or in front of the sprayer, 12 motor

speeds, bout marker selection, a battery level indicator and optional hand lance. Spray application rates, operating speed, and the pump pressure can be accurately and quickly controlled by the operator, as well as the adjustable boom height and independent shut-off nozzle bodies.



### MILWAUKEE TOOL M18 4-GALLON BACKPACK SPRAYER WITH SWITCH TANK

The Milwaukee Tool M18 4-gallon backpack sprayer with Switch Tank delivers pressure control with no manual pumping and an interchangeable tank design. The backpack sprayer provides users with instant, constant and adjustable pressure up to 140 psi and a 24-foot vertical spray distance. The 5-mode flow rate knob adjusts the flow 0.1 to 0.52 gpm. Milwaukee Tool's M18 Redlithium XC3.0 battery provides up to 20 tanks of spraying per charge on Mode 3. The 4-gallon sprayer tank assembly features a dual diaphragm pump for longer pump life and Viton seals for increased durability against harsh chemicals. The sprayer tank has an optimized design for better weight distribution, a wide mouth opening for easier pouring, and a strainer that filters debris from getting into the tank. The backpack frame includes padded straps, lumbar support and hip belt for added comfort.

### SCAG TURF STORM AND TURF STORM XL

Built Scag Tough, the Turf Storm and Turf Storm XL stand-on spreader/sprayers are must-have tools for the serious landscape chemical applicator. The smaller STS30 model can venture



where larger machines cannot. The larger Turf Storm XL (STS60) is built to cover more ground for maximum

productivity. With right-sized liquid (30 or 60 total gallons) and dry/granular (120- or 220-pound) capacities, the Turf Storm and Turf Storm XL will help operators get more done per day. Foldaway spray booms deliver spraying widths of 2, 6 or 8 feet, and up to 10 feet with the XL. Dry/granular materials can be spread up to 25-feet wide thanks to a high-torque electric spreader motor. Each unit also has an auxiliary hose, allowing users to reach tough spots. A 23-hp. Vanguard engine delivers power, efficiency and performance.

### STEEL GREEN SGXL

The Steel Green SGXL is built for sports field managers who make frequent applications and value precision. With a 120-gallon spray capacity and a 14-foot rear-mounted breakaway boom, the SGXL can tackle fields quickly, and its pressure control system ensures consistent spray output, even when adjusting nozzles. The standard 2.5-gallon foam marker improves accuracy, while the hillside assist system and 100-foot hose reel allow for



applications in tough-to-reach areas. It also has an LED light bar for early morning work. The optional SGXL granular attachment kit transforms the SGXL into a dual-purpose machine, replacing the liquid system with a 350-pound hopper in minutes.

### TURFCO T3200 AND T5000

The Turfco T3200 and its big brother, the T5000, are built to tackle the whole field, as well as all the tight spaces around the field. With powerful engines, these machines deliver application speeds up to 7 mph. Accurately line up the next pass using the intuitive steering wheel drive system and get unshakable stability on hills, eliminate turf-tearing, and reduce training time. Two-nozzle boomless design eliminates the challenges of spray booms, letting you glide past obstacles without slowing down. Hard trim and application rate controls eliminate off-target prills, maintain application rate and dramatically reduce wasted fertilizer. Optional T-Flex15 Tank increases your



productivity. With the T5000 cover up to 300,000 sq. ft. or spray a different chemical at the same time or spot spray with added hand wand. Pivoting front axle and unique steering wheel design offers more control on uneven ground.



### Z-SPRAY MAX SPREADER-SPRAYER

With a 10-foot spray boom, the Z-Spray Max is the largest, most productive spreader-sprayer Z Turf Equipment offers. The low-center-of-gravity design places the operator between the drive wheels, and the heaviest components low and centrally within the corrosion-resistant stainless-steel frame. The bi-directional spray boom springs both forward and back to avoid damage from contact. The patented foam marker activation system starts the marker and spray pump simultaneously whether using the toe switch or the panel-mounted rocker switch. The contoured operator pad and revised control layout to provide increased comfort and economy of motion, while larger drive tires provide a smoother ride. A patented magnetic operator pad removes easily, without tools, for access to the spray chart, or for maintenance. The patented flip-up hopper eases hopper cleaning and engine access. **SFM**



# Using Plant Growth Regulators to Manage Facility Landscapes

By Rebecca Knapp, CSFM

Managing a sports field complex goes far beyond maintaining pristine turfgrass. Plant growth regulators (PGRs) are often an unfamiliar concept outside of turf management, but these products can be highly effective tools for managing landscape plants and trees around sports complexes.

Why would sports field managers want to slow down plant growth? Surprisingly, using PGRs can lead to significant labor savings, reduced maintenance costs, and healthier plants — all while keeping sports facilities looking their best.

Surrounding landscapes (including trees, shrubs, and ornamental plants) play a critical role in creating an inviting and professional atmosphere for athletes, spectators and staff. However, balancing the demands of busy sports schedules, limited staff and shrinking maintenance budgets can be challenging. This is where PGRs come into play — not just for turfgrass but also for managing trees and landscape plants.

## HOW DO PGRS WORK?

PGRs are chemical compounds that influence plant growth by modifying hormone activity; and have long been used in turfgrass management to reduce mowing frequency. Early PGR formulations were similar to herbicides, limiting growth by blocking cell division. Although this helped to reduce plant height, it often caused side effects such as leaf yellowing, distortion and, in extreme cases, defoliation.

Modern PGR formulations are much more refined. They work by inhibiting the gibberellin



*This is a great example of successful hedge management — even, dense growth with no bare spots or gaps. All photos courtesy of Arborjet | Ecologel*

hormone, responsible for cell elongation. This means plants still produce the same number of cells, leaves, buds and shoots — but with 30 to 70 percent less growth. This reduction can extend pruning intervals for landscape plants around sports fields, where frequent trimming can be time consuming and costly.

## OPTIMIZING SPORTS FIELD LANDSCAPES WITH PGRS

Sports field managers face unique challenges. Consider a multi-sport complex with frequent events from youth soccer tournaments to high school football games; maintaining these highly visible, multi-use facilities

that endure heavy foot traffic, weather extremes and minimal downtime is often a year-round task for landscape crews. These complexes often include trees, shrubs, hedges and ground covers that require routine maintenance around the entire facility, including fences, parking lots, dugouts, scoreboards, walkways and spectator stands. Applying PGRs can reduce the need for pruning these numerous plants, making landscape management tasks much more time efficient.

## KEY BENEFITS TO IMPLEMENTING PGRs IN YOUR OPERATIONS

### 1. GROWTH REGULATION, REDUCED PRUNING AND TRIMMING FREQUENCY

One of the biggest advantages of using PGRs is reducing the need for frequent pruning and trimming. Around sports fields, landscape plants such as hedges, shrubs and trees near walkways, bleachers and parking lots often require frequent maintenance to prevent overgrowth.

Operational efficiency means more time can be allocated for field maintenance, game preparation, irrigation system maintenance and other essential tasks. Well-maintained shrubs and trees enhance the visual appeal of the overall facility, without constant upkeep.

### 2. ENHANCED PLANT HEALTH AND STRESS TOLERANCE

PGRs do more than just reduce growth — they can also improve plant health. PGRs encourage root development and boost drought tolerance, stimulating the production of abscisic acid (ABA), a hormone that helps plants manage water loss by closing the stomata during drought conditions. Health benefits for sports field landscapes:

■ **Improved drought resistance:** Treated plants develop thicker, waxier leaves, which improve drought resistance by reducing both leaf scorch and water loss. This is particularly valuable in areas with high sun exposure, temperature extremes and windy conditions.

■ **Stronger and enhanced plant health:** PGR applications promote fine root development, enabling plants to access water and nutrients more



*The plant growth regulator helped produce thicker, waxier leaves, which results in less water loss and a reduced potential for the leaf scorch you see on the untreated cutting above it.*

effectively. An increase in chlorophyll production leads to deeper green leaves and boosts overall tree and shrub health while reducing chlorosis symptoms — keeping landscapes both visually appealing and functional. Additionally, reduced pruning wounds result in healthier, more resilient plants.

■ **Disease suppression:** PGRs thicken leaf surfaces, making it harder for fungal disease to take hold. Because of this secondary benefit, studies have shown that PGR-treated plants are less susceptible to certain pathogens, such as leaf spot and cankers.



### 3. LABOR AND COST SAVINGS

Labor shortages and tight budgets are common challenges in the industry. By reducing pruning and green waste disposal, PGRs can generate significant labor and cost savings. Less frequent pruning also reduces fuel costs for equipment, sharpening cutting surfaces, and overall wear-and-tear — ultimately extending the lifespan of tools and machinery.

In trials, highly manicured shrubs treated with PGRs required 60 percent less pruning over a 12-week period, and green waste was reduced by 50 percent. These savings allow sports field crews to focus on essential tasks such as mowing, edging and field maintenance instead of repetitive pruning.

### 4. SAFETY, REDUCED LIABILITY, AND VISIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Overgrown trees and shrubs can create safety hazards by blocking visibility around sports complexes. Walkways, entry points and parking lots must remain clear and safe for visitors. PGR-treated plants stay within desired size limits longer, reducing the risk of overgrowth-related hazards. PGRs can assist with ensuring sidewalks remain free of overhanging branches, preventing trees and shrubs from blocking security cameras, facility lighting and signage. This also improves traffic safety and reduces liability by helping maintain clear sightlines around entrances and exits.

### 5. SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Sustainability is increasingly important for sports field managers looking to reduce their facility's environmental footprint. PGRs support eco-friendly practices by reducing green waste and water use while lowering emissions. With reduced pruning, there's less plant material to dispose of, decreasing landfill contributions. Fewer maintenance tasks mean lower emissions from power tools and transportation, while enhanced root systems improve drought tolerance and reduce irrigation needs.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR APPLYING PGRS

To maximize the benefits of PGRs, sports field managers should follow these application guidelines:

- **Select the right PGR:** Choose products formulated specifically for trees and landscape plants. Be sure that the label includes woody plants, trees or shrubs based on the facility's specific landscape features.
- **Timing matters:** Apply PGRs during active growing seasons when plants are expanding. If trimming prior to application, consult the label for application timing post-trimming.
- **Proper application:** Use trained staff or certified applicators to ensure even coverage and avoid over-application.
- **Calibrate equipment:** Uneven applications can cause inconsistent growth regulation.
- **Follow-up monitoring:** Observe plant response and inspect treated plants regularly to adjust maintenance schedules accordingly.
- **Regulatory:** Follow all local regulations and product label instructions.



*A section of this ficus was treated on May 6 via foliar application, and both cuttings were taken around eight weeks later (on June 30). The cutting that was treated with a plant growth regulator experienced greater chlorophyll production and less growth, resulting in a healthier — and more visually appealing — shrub.*

*In this image, the tree on the left was treated with a plant growth regulator via soil application, while the tree on the right was not. The treated tree saw more chlorophyll production and less overall growth, which gives it a more visually appealing, healthier look.*



## TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR LANDSCAPE

PGRs are an invaluable tool for sports field managers looking to optimize their field management programs while maintaining high standards of landscape care. With tight maintenance schedules, limited staff, and growing responsibilities, sports field managers can't afford to let landscape plants dictate their workload. PGRs offer a proactive, valuable management solution that helps crews maximize productivity while ensuring plants stay visually appealing — all while reducing labor demands, saving costs, reducing unwanted growth, and promoting healthier, more-resilient plants.

By integrating PGRs into plant health care programs, sports field managers can create safer, more aesthetically pleasing complexes while allowing their crews to focus on what matters most — keeping the playing field game ready with critical tasks such as cultural practices, field preparation and maintaining irrigation schedules.

The next time you walk through your sports facility, consider the hedges, ground covers and trees that need constant trimming. With PGRs, you can take control of plant growth, allowing your crews to stay ahead of maintenance while keeping the site looking professional year-round. **SFM**



***The shrub on the left was treated with a plant growth regulator and experienced reduced growth, less green waste and more efficient use of plant energy.***

Rebecca Knapp, CSFM, is a technical advisor for Arborjet | Ecologel. She is a Certified Sports Field Manager, International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist and earned a Sustainable Landscape Management certificate from the Arizona Landscape Contrac-

tors Association. She focuses her time on supporting sports field managers, golf course superintendents and turf/plant health care professionals with solutions for soil, plant nutrition and water efficiency. She can be reached at [rknapp@arborjet.com](mailto:rknapp@arborjet.com).



## FROM THE FEEDS

The following are photos and posts pulled from industry social media feeds during the past month.

Scan the QR code for links to all of our feeds and connect with us.



### @TurfgrassTiger

One of the best times of the year at the @FieldExperts conference. Got to present alongside friends, spend time with our @ToroGrounds family, and present the George Toma Golden Rake Award to the most deserving human being in the world @aggiefieldguy! Such a special moment.

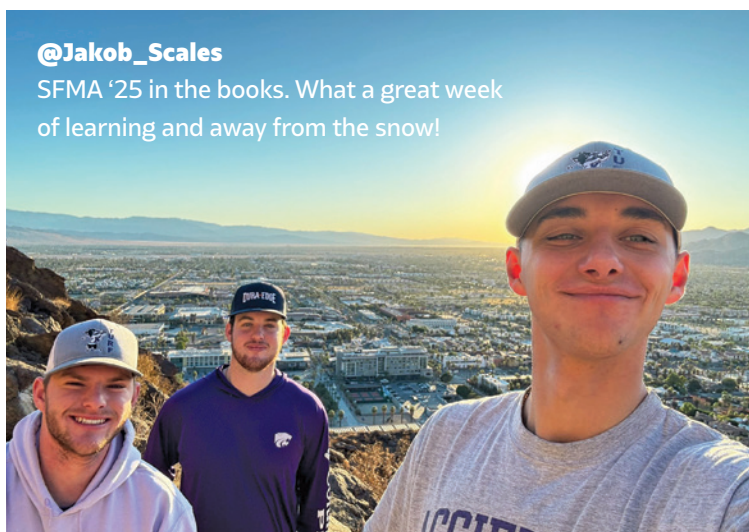


### @SportsTurfSun

Alright SFMA, let's do this! Looking forward to seeing everyone here at the Oasis of Knowledge in Palm Springs. @FieldExperts #AlwaysGrowing #SFMA2025



### @leahlou2



### @Jakob\_Scales

SFMA '25 in the books. What a great week of learning and away from the snow!



@juliekessler15



## George Toma Golden Rake Award



**Nick McKenna, C**

Assistant Athletics Director, Sports  
Texas A&M Athletics.

36th Annual Conference & Exhibition January 13-16, 2025 Palm

@ag90turfgrass

One of the happiest days in my Life!  
Congrats @aggiefieldguy! So deserving Nick!



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@womeninturfteam

Got the band back together for @FieldExperts 2025 in Palm Springs and finally had the chance to thank our sponsors in person! Conference always sets the tone for the year ahead, sunny skies are in our forecast!

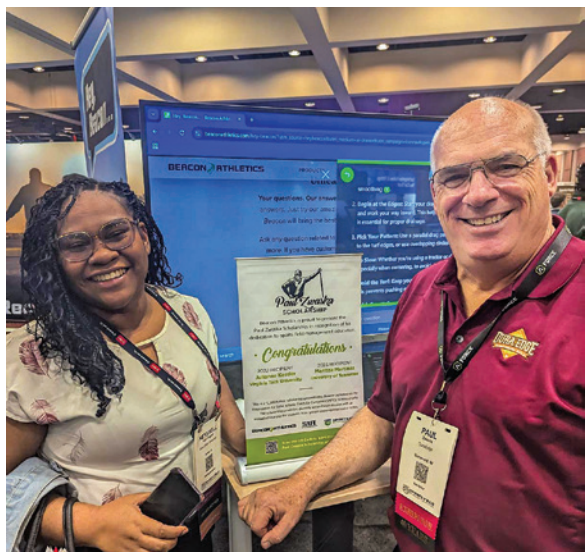


@MegKruger



@TurfSpartanLord





**@beaconathletics**

We're pleased to announce the latest recipient of the Paul Zwaska Sponsorship. Congratulations to Keyshell Shakira Cole Hodgson, a second-year master's student in Horticulture focusing on Turfgrass Management at Iowa State University — go be great Keyshell!! #sfma2025



**@joshdejongcsfm**



**@msudawg2004**



**@bj\_thomas20**

What a week. All I can say is thank you to everyone who has helped me, invested in me and believed in me! I'm thankful for my coworkers, vendors and @womeninturfteam for showing up to support me yesterday. #SFMA2025





**@SFMA**

The future of sports field management is in good hands! Congratulations to Aidan Huedepohl, Joseph Lofland, Ryan Daub, and Kyler McGowan from Penn State University on winning the 2025 SFMA Student Challenge Cup! #SFMA #StudentChallenge #NextGen @agsciences



**@ASUGroundsCrew**

Had an absolute blast in Palm Springs. Thank you so much to @FieldExperts for an awesome week and for the award. It means so much to our crew!



**@cwalsh0014**

Thank you @fieldexperts for putting on a great #SFMA conference this last week in Palm Springs! I had a wonderful time connecting and learning with some great people in the sports turf industry. Catching up with old friends and meeting new ones and seeing @colt45\_box accept his #risingstar award were just a few of the highlights.



# PARTY LIKE IT'S...

# 1999

In this retrospective, we examine historic issues of *SportsTurf* magazine, predecessor to *SportsField Management* magazine. For this edition of Accessing the Archives we're gonna party like it's 1999.

The January 1999 issue kicked off the year with a profile of Dr. Henry Indyk, the *SportsTurf* "Man of the Year" for 1999. According to the article, "Indyk played a key role in saving the association seven years ago when it was deeply in debt and in danger of collapsing. There were many times when he spent money from his own pocket to travel to meetings and provide food for attendees before the association gained widespread recognition and corporate support."

The January issue also outlined how to survive winter injury. "Fields that enter winter in top shape have the best chance of emerging from winter stress in playable condition. Survival strategies include a well-managed, year-round maintenance program, and as much fall preparation as field use schedules, weather, time and funding allow."

The Akron Aeros' Canal Park winning Professional Baseball Diamond of the Year was the highlight of the February 1999 issue. Director of Field Maintenance Rick Izzo explained, "In 1997, our first year of operation, the Cleveland Indians

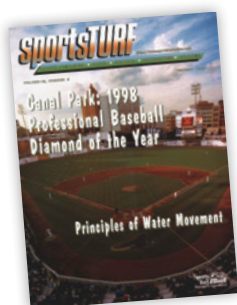
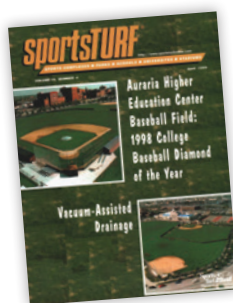
affiliate Akron Aeros led all of AA baseball in total attendance with 473,232, setting a new Eastern League record. In 1998, Akron again led AA attendance, shattering our own record by drawing 521,122 to Canal Park."

The March cover story by Paul Zwaska delved into "Infield Soils and Topdressing." Zwaska's "Goals for a quality infield skin," included traction, drainage and topdressing. He also outlined infield base soil testing and guidelines; infield topdressing options; maintenance issues and more.

April 1999 detailed vacuum-assisted drainage. Dr. William H. Daniel developed a technique that uses vacuum power to assist drainage on athletic fields — the Prescription Athletic Turf (PAT) system. "A vacuum is applied beneath the soil through special drain lines. The vacuum increases the driving force for water to infiltrate and move downward through the soil. This vacuum-assisted drainage is intended to enable fields to remain playable even after or during rainfall that would render other natural-turf fields unfit."

In the May issue, Steve Wightman detailed field painting tips including set-up, paint selection, painting techniques, timing, and equipment options.

The May 1999 issue also announced what was then the new *Sports Turf*



magazine website. The article urged readers not to be intimidated by going online and “dialing up” our site. The article stated that the website would be “updated monthly!”



Jody Gill and Sam Ferro wrote the June 1999 cover story on “Growing Bermudagrass in Kansas.” The feature detailed how Blue Valley School District used Quickstand bermudagrass to withstand Kansas winters. “The particular strain featured winter hardiness, quick spring green-up, and the safety of bermuda compared to the rough and clumpy tall fescue fields that were

common in the area. Bermuda also offered significant heat tolerance advantages over bluegrass fields, and Kansas summers often experience long stretches of 90- to 105-degree F weather.”

In July 1999, *SportsTurf* magazine helped readers address “Growing Pains.” “As if dealing with budget limitations isn’t enough, finding space to accommodate all of your facility’s athletic activities can be a persistent headache,” the article stated. “At the high school level, community growth can compound the problem. As schools grow, playing fields often have to yield space to make way for building and parking area expansion. Athletic facilities shrink, while athletic programs grow and become more diverse, and the sports turf manager must come up with new solutions to a growing problem. Sometimes, the only choice is to turn fields into multi-use sites.”



NFL field managers Ross Kurcab (Denver Broncos), Steve Wightman (San Diego Chargers), and Rich Genoff (San Francisco 49ers) shared “NFL Techniques for Better and Safer Fields” in the August 1999 issue; outlining budgeting, keeping a field log, communicating with users, prioritizing field safety, growing healthy grass, mowing practices, field renovation and more.

The focus in September was on a Seminar on Wheels tour in Denver of Mile High Stadium, Coors Field and the Denver Broncos Practice Facility. Other topic areas

in that issue included paspalum, mower emissions, tree care, and dealing with drought.

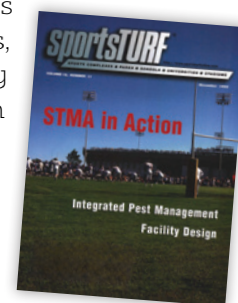
In the October issue, Jim Puhalla outlined USGA specifications in sports fields. “United States Golf Association (USGA) specifications for the construction



of putting greens have been used for sports field projects on many occasions,” he stated. “These specifications rely on sand that is amended with organic material such as peat. With some appropriate modifications, USGA specs can create a field that maintains its playability under a wide variety of weather conditions.”

The November issue was a mix of content with turf blankets, integrated pest management, facility design, chemigation and green waste processing.

The most interesting aspect of the December 1999 issue was a Year In Review feature. Association membership grew from 975 in 1997



to 1,254 in 1998 and again to 1,579 in 1999. Four chapters also joined STMA in 1999 with the Indiana, Tennessee Valley, North Texas, and Wisconsin chapters joining the 12 chapters already affiliated: Colorado, Florida #1, Great Lakes, Iowa, KAFMO, MAFMO, Michigan, Midwest, MidSouth, Minnesota, Northern California, and Southern California. The STMA Conference also grew attendance in 1999; STMA committees grew; and the association launched a website. **SFM**



All content for this section is pulled from the SportsTurf/ SportsField Management archives, an ongoing cooperative project of EPG Media, SFMA and the Michigan State University Libraries. Public access to the archive from 1985 to the present (less two months) is available at <https://sturf.lib.msu.edu/index.html>.





## Jacobsen introduces HR3 ELiTE rotary mower

Ransomes Jacobsen Ltd., a Textron Inc. (NYSE: TXT) company, introduced its new Jacobsen HR3 ELiTE rotary mower. The HR3 ELiTE leverages Jacobsen's proven electric drivetrain, powered by Samsung SDI lithium battery technology, to deliver quality of cut with zero emissions, less noise, and significantly reduced operating costs.

The HR3 ELiTE pairs its electrically driven transaxle with electric motors for its cutting system, eliminating emissions and reducing noise.

The HR3 ELiTE's low noise level also makes for a safer operating environment for the mower's user, and high-spec suspension seating and intuitive controls further enhance the operator experience. The mower's tilt-sensor technology enhances safety when operating on slopes. For cutting along thoroughfares, the HR3 ELiTE is road-safe, with LED lighting and mirrors.

The HR3 ELiTE's Samsung SDI lithium battery system utilizes the same zero-maintenance technology in use in tens of thousands of Jacobsen mowers, Cushman utility vehicles and E-Z-GO golf cars. The battery system provides more than 40 kilowatt-hours of energy for all-day runtime, and is backed by a five-year battery warranty. An onboard charger simplifies recharging and is designed for overnight use, so the mower can be fully charged and ready for the next day's work without drawing power during peak energy hours.

With a cutting width of 1.52 meters (4.98 feet) and adjustable cutting height, the HR3 ELiTE delivers Jacobsen's renowned quality of cut. A high-strength steel frame with solid bumper rails protects the mower from the rigors of everyday use, and onboard diagnostics allow operators to easily monitor the mower's performance in real time.

The HR3 ELiTE is available now from Jacobsen authorized distributors and dealers.

## Toro showcases all-new Groundsmaster e3300

Toro showcased the new Groundsmaster e3300 at the 2025 Sports Field Management Association (SFMA) Conference and Exhibition in Palm Springs, California. This battery-powered option of Toro's popular out-front rotary mower will be available in 2025.

The Groundsmaster e3300 is powered by HyperCell batteries — Toro's proprietary, patent-pending lithium-ion technology. The distributed Battery Management System (BMS) optimizes battery performance to enhance productivity and longevity. Because the BMS is integrated, HyperCell batteries communicate with each other to optimize efficiency and extend the lifecycle, well beyond the 5,000-hour design life of the traction unit. HyperCell batteries provide diagnostic information to simplify and streamline any service needs. A third-party recycling program is available for batteries that reach end of life.

The Groundsmaster e3300 can be configured with up to 17 HyperCell batteries for extended runtime in the most demanding conditions. Smart Power mode optimizes power consumption by continuously and efficiently providing ample cutting power without bogging the machine down. Additionally, a battery reserve setting ensures plenty of power to return the mower to the recharging station. Equipped with an EVSE (Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment)-ready

3.3 kW on-board charger, operators can simply plug in the Groundsmaster e3300 overnight so it's ready for operation the next day. **SFM**



## FIFA president visits University of Tennessee, hails groundbreaking turf research

FIFA President Gianni Infantino praised the groundbreaking efforts at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's turf research and development facility during a visit that highlighted the university's pivotal role in preparing the best possible pitches for both the FIFA Club World Cup 2025 and FIFA World Cup 26.

Following the June 2022 announcement of host cities and venues for the FIFA World Cup 26, FIFA's pitch management team launched a five-year research and development project with UT and Michigan State University. The initiative — now expanded to include the first-ever FIFA Club World Cup — aims to produce perfect playing surfaces, ensuring consistency and top performance for players regardless of climate or stadium type.

Infantino praised the efforts led by John Sorochoan, Ph.D., distinguished professor of Turfgrass Science and Management in UT's Herbert College of Agriculture, and thanked university leadership for their support in bringing the project to fruition.

Sorochoan and Alan Ferguson, FIFA senior pitch management manager, gave a tour of various exterior and interior research stations at the UT Institute of Agriculture's East Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center's plant sciences unit. Infantino was impressed by the progressive use of technology that can benefit both player welfare and the spectacle of 167 matches across two global tournaments.

"The quality of the pitches is important for these two fantastic competitions in cities which all have different conditions — some are at sea level, some are at altitude, some are in domes and covered — so we want to make sure that the quality of the pitch is the same for all teams and all players in all cities," Infantino told assembled media. "The quality of the surface, the grass, has always been of paramount importance to me.

"With our internal team at FIFA we have always been exploring ways to do things better, especially when you have a tournament that is lasting one month (or) a month and a half and is played in different cities. Our team investigated and found the best people in the world to help us, and it's fair to say that with Alan Ferguson we had this vision and joined forces to do something where the focus



is the World Cup and the Club World Cup but from which the whole world will benefit."

Infantino was joined on the tour of the research facilities by Carlos Cordeiro, senior adviser; Manolo Zubiria, chief tournament officer USA for FIFA World Cup 26; and Romy Gai, chief business officer.

Sorochoan said FIFA's support of cutting-edge research at UT and MSU will hopefully revolutionize the sports turf industry and leave a lasting legacy long after the FIFA World Cup has concluded.

"The focus is on consistency and uniformity," said Sorochoan. "For 104 matches across 16 stadiums — including five indoors — at different altitudes, in different countries and on two types of grass, the goal is to make them play the same. So when an athlete is running and cutting — whether in Miami, Mexico City or Vancouver — they shouldn't feel any difference underfoot. Likewise, when the ball strikes the surface and reaches them, it should behave consistently. That has been my vision and goal from the beginning. This is where FIFA has been incredible, investing in research and using evidence-based data to achieve the highest-quality pitch possible."

The FIFA Club World Cup 2025 will mark a significant milestone as it will be the first to feature an expanded format with 32 teams, including the winners of the four previous continental championships. The event is scheduled to take place in the United States from June 14 to July 13.

The FIFA World Cup 26 competition will take place in June and July 2026, with 48 teams playing throughout 16 cities in Canada, Mexico and the United States. The competition will stretch across four time zones and three climatic zones and conclude at the final in New York-New Jersey on July 19, 2026. **SFM**

– Article and photo provided by University of Tennessee, Knoxville.









## SFMA Affiliated Chapters Contact Information

**Arizona SFMA:** [www.azsfma.org](http://www.azsfma.org)

**Colorado SFMA:** [www.csfma.org](http://www.csfma.org)

**Florida #1 (South Florida STMA):**  
[www.sfstma.com](http://www.sfstma.com) or  
 Phil Busey ([phil@philbusey.com](mailto:phil@philbusey.com))

**Florida #2 (North Florida):**  
 850-580-4026,  
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**Florida #3 (Central Florida STMA):**  
[www.CFSFMA.org](http://www.CFSFMA.org) or  
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**Greater L.A. Basin SFMA:**  
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# Back to Natural Grass

**Q:** I noticed that UNC-Chapel Hill is converting its football stadium playing surface from synthetic turf back to natural grass. Why would they do that?

**Author's note:** This question came from someone outside the sports field management industry.

**A:** A full account of the reasons would need to come from UNC's director of athletics. I can only provide reasons reported by their athletic department along with some background as to why they may have made this decision.

As per reports, the playing surface in Kenan Stadium will be renovated in early spring 2025 to natural grass (Tahoma 31 hybrid bermudagrass), with a synthetic turf perimeter. Using synthetic turf outside the playing surface is a design that can help maintain a turfgrass-like surface consistency in this area of low sunlight, high traffic, and excessive runoff from the field and stands — factors that can make growing healthy natural grass challenging.

According to UNC's director of athletics, their current synthetic turf surface is reaching the end of its lifespan, which prompted them to discuss what surface they wanted next. The stadium field had a natural grass surface for most of its 100-year history until a synthetic perimeter was added in 2017 when the hedges and fences were removed. Then, in 2019, the entire field was renovated to a synthetic turf surface, coinciding with Mack Brown's return as head football coach. The new field design will be very similar to the design used from 2017-2019.

This change from synthetic back to natural grass also coincides with a change in the head football coach. According to reports from the university, new Head Coach Bill Belichick wants to run his program as close to a professional organization as possible. According to a 2024 NFL survey, more than 90 percent of professional football players prefer playing on natural grass. The NFL players union voiced its concerns in 2024, urging the league to require natural grass surfaces in all stadiums. The players union cited data collected for the NFL that indicated lower-extremity injuries are much more common on synthetic turf surfaces than on natural grass. Perhaps Coach Belichick is bringing those

concerns to the school's athletic administration when suggesting his desire to switch to a natural grass surface.

The primary reasons teams use synthetic turfgrass surfaces with open stadiums is for multi-use versatility of the surface for other events, as well as a consistent field surface regardless of weather conditions. Kenan Stadium has been used for non-sporting events such as commencements; and the field has also been used for conditioning, practice and play for various varsity sports during the renovation of their specific sports facilities. The football team has a synthetic surface available for use in their indoor practice facility, along with several other outdoor synthetic sports fields on campus. So, they will still have access to a synthetic surface for practices as needed.

Another factor that may have contributed to the changeover decision is that during the last two years Kenan Stadium hosted two international soccer matches, requiring the Athletic Department to install thick-cut sod over the top of the synthetic turf surface as a temporary natural grass surface. With a permanent natural grass surface, hosting future international soccer events in Kenan Stadium would require far less field preparation.

I am sure there are several other tangible and intangible reasons that UNC discussed before finalizing their decision. A significant factor I hope they considered is that their field management staff possesses the expertise needed to manage a great natural grass field. Kenan Stadium won the 2018 SFMA Field of the Year in the college football category, and UNC's Dorrance Field won the 2021 SFMA Field of the Year in the college sporting grounds category. Their dedicated sports field managers are sure to provide athletes with the best surface possible **SFM**



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## Questions?

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