

SportsField

MANAGEMENT

March 2026

Vol. 42 No. 3

The Official Publication of the Sports Field Management Association

CONSISTENCY *and* COMMITMENT

Equity Bank Park reflects crew's dedication and attention to detail with Professional Baseball FOY win

WIND SURGE

ALSO INSIDE:
SFMA Conference
Recap



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Editor's Note



John Kmitta

Associate Publisher /
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The 2026 SFMA Conference and Exhibition was held January 18-22, 2026, in Fort Worth, Texas, and this issue of *SportsField Management* recaps this year's event.

For me, there were plenty of highlights. From the welcome reception all the way through the annual awards banquet and dinner, there was always something happening.

First, I want to extend my thanks to our partners at SFMA for setting us up with a dedicated space to record



**Photo by
Mark Skalny.**

podcasts live from conference. I thoroughly enjoyed my discussions with key industry leaders, and we have already begun to release those conversations on our website and wherever your favorite podcasts are found.

In addition to those planned podcast discussions, the week was filled with plenty of other great impromptu conversations and networking. SFMA Conference is always the best opportunity to connect — and reconnect — with so many amazing people from throughout this industry.

I was also excited this year to have an opportunity to join the Thursday

half-day Seminar On Wheels tour to AT&T Stadium (home of the Dallas Cowboys) and Globe Life Field (home of the Texas Rangers). The behind-the-scenes look was great, but the most memorable moment was being among those temporarily stuck on a huge freight elevator at Globe Life Field.



**Photo by
John Kmitta.**

But we all made it out in time to wrap up the conference in grand fashion at the awards banquet. I once again want to thank SFMA for incorporating our Rising Star Awards into the banquet. It was great to give recognition to our 2025 class of Rising Stars on the main stage in front of their peers. I hope this will encourage all of you to nominate a Rising Star for our 2026 class (<https://sportsfield-managementonline.com/rising-star-awards/>).

I hope you enjoy our full recap of everything the conference had to offer, and I look forward to seeing you all in Tampa in February of 2027. **SFM**

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President's Message



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Alpha Jones, CSFM

SFMA President

ajonessfma@gmail.com

March is a pivotal month for sports field managers. Fields are coming back to life, schedules are filling quickly, and expectations rise with every practice and game. It's a busy season, but it's also a chance to highlight our profession's commitment to professionalism.

Professionalism shows up in many forms — clear communication, thoughtful planning, attention to detail, and the ability to adapt. These habits strengthen daily operations and reinforce the credibility of our profession.

Professionalism also plays a critical role in supporting the workforce pipeline. Many of you are preparing to hire seasonal staff, welcome student workers, or bring new team members on board. Every new hire forms their understanding of our profession through the culture you create.

SFMA is committed to leading national efforts to grow and support that pipeline. We are expanding partnerships, enhancing educational resources, and championing the visibility and respect this profession deserves. One example is SFMA's Turfgrass Science Certification, delivered through the iCEV platform. This certification validates essential knowledge for maintaining athletic surfaces and

helps employers connect with candidates who demonstrate competencies in turfgrass anatomy, environmental management, cultural practices, and playing surface preparation.

You can also lean on the support and resources SFMA provides. Our Best Practices documents, Facility Safety and Maintenance checklists, and SFMA Learning University offer practical tools you can use immediately. These resources are designed to help you work efficiently, communicate clearly, and reinforce the standards that define our profession.

Another way to demonstrate professionalism is by earning SFMA's Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) designation. CSFMs uphold the highest standards of safety, playability and performance. If you aren't yet ready to take the CSFM exam, there are many ways to continue growing. Attend a chapter, state, or regional event; pursue CEUs; participate in webinars and online learning; listen to podcasts; and put those lessons into practice.

As we move into the heart of the spring season, I encourage you to take pride in the standards you uphold and the example you set. Your professionalism not only elevates your operation, it helps shape the next generation of sports field managers. **SFM**

— Alpha Jones, CSFM



Photos on this page provided by Equip Expo and OPEI

A Tale of Two Cities

Equip Exposition to rotate between Louisville and Orlando beginning in 2029

By John Knitta and Brian Ethridge

Equip Exposition recently announced that the outdoor power equipment industry's biggest trade show will rotate between Louisville, Kentucky, and Orlando, Florida, beginning in 2029.

The show will be held at the Orlando County Convention Center October 10-12, 2029, with additional shows in Orlando in 2031 and 2033, and in Louisville at the Kentucky Exposition Center (KEC) in 2028, 2030 and 2032.

According to the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), which owns and manages the show, the two-city rotation will expand global access with direct international air traffic and new venue choices for attendees and exhibitors, while enhancing outdoor demonstration opportunities in Louisville.

Equip 2025 expanded to 1.2 million square feet at the KEC and drew nearly 30,000 registered attendees from all

50 states and 52 countries, marking an attendance and net square footage record for the fourth year in a row.

According to Kris Kiser, president of OPEI, this move is not about leaving Louisville, but rather about establishing a two-city show that offers varied experiences at each location. Hosting Equip in Orlando will allow enhanced opportunities for special events such as receptions, concerts and dealer meetings, as well as the ability to co-locate with other events.

"We've dramatically grown the show since 2022," said Kiser. "We took it in-house, and went from 18,000 to 30,000 [attendees] in four years' time. We've outgrown the footprint, and our ability to co-locate."

Kiser added that Equip didn't want to give up what makes it unique, which is the outdoor demonstration area. The Orlando site will still allow for equipment demonstration, but it will be a different experience from Louisville, as the Orlando demo area will be on asphalt. In Orlando, the 20-acre parking lot



**OPEI President
Kris Kiser**

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Photos on this page
by John Kmitta

used for outdoor demonstrations will be immediately adjacent to the Orlando County Convention Center.

"We will have outdoor demo space," said Kiser. "It's just different. We're not going to dig, we can't cut, and we can't trench; but we think that differentiation helps us grow both shows."

According to Kiser, OPEI didn't move the Equip Exposition offices to Louisville in 2022 only to move the show; adding that Louisville is part of the show's history, and OPEI wants to lean into that history.

"We're committed to the community here, and the city here," he said. "Louisville is a one-of-a-kind space where you can tear up dirt outside the back door. So we want to maintain that."

According to Kiser, although Equip already draws attendees from around the world, the Orlando site will significantly increase international attendance.

"One of the challenges some of our very large exhibitors faced is that they want to bring in leadership from Japan, China, Germany, the UK..., he said. "Their time is valuable, and it's spent clearing customs and connecting [to Louisville]. I think we will get very significant international traffic, and we hope that that translates into folks coming to Louisville who had not given Louisville a chance."

Kiser added that hosting the show in these two locations will allow for different social opportunities, different peer-to-peer opportunities, and different engagement opportunities.

Equip Exposition 2026 will be held Oct. 20-23 in Louisville, and OPEI and Equip have already initiated conversations with local partners, including Louisville Tourism and Kentucky Venues, about enhancing and expanding the show's experience at the KEC.

According to Kiser, the KEC is working to build a new west wing; and although other specific enhancements to the venue are yet to be determined, he has urged their partners in Kentucky to lean into the aspect of the KEC that makes it unique — the outdoor demonstration area — and create a superior outdoor digging space that differentiates KEC from all other trade show venues.

While the Orlando version of Equip will be a different experience from the Louisville version of the show, Kiser added that OPEI will look to continue aspects of Equip that attendees have come to know and love, including the Mutt Madness pet adoption event.

"We want to continue our legacy events in Florida," he said. "We may have a new effort — maybe "Lucky Dog" Live — but we will have Mutt Madness, and we'll likely partner with the humane society there. It's premature, because we are a few years out, but we want to continue what we are known for."

Added Kiser, "We're not leaving Louisville, we are moving into a two-city rotation. I think we will grow the show in both venues and have them be unique enough while being the same enough to make them great shows." **SFM**

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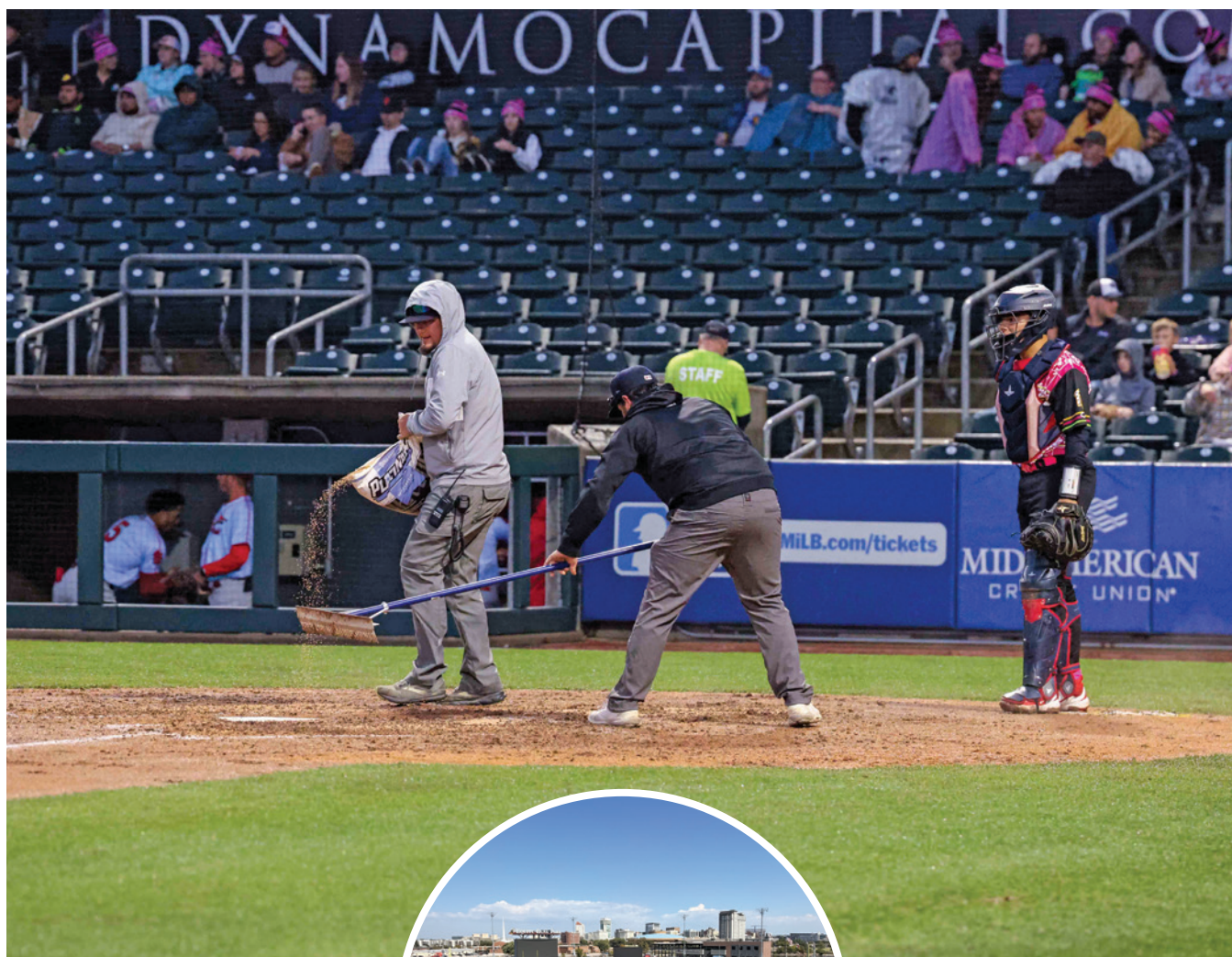
FIELD OF THE YEAR
PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL

EQUITY BANK PARK

WICHITA WIND SURGE



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THERE'S NO QUESTION THAT what we do is at a high level. We take great pride in being advocates for the turf industry and in delivering a first-class playing surface every single day. Player safety is always our top priority, and we consistently maintain the field to the highest possible standard. Our results speak for themselves. Our consistency, quality and dedication are reflected in this year's ratings, where we placed first in all 15 categories. Each year, our challenge continues to grow as more outside events are added to our schedule. 2025 was our longest season to date, stretching from March 1 through November 1, yet we continued to uphold the same elite standard throughout. We had games played in the 40s in April and above 100 degrees August,

which makes managing both turf and dirt a constant challenge. The infield skin is especially demanding, but through daily nail dragging, rolling, floating and proper moisture management, we keep it firm and consistent. Keeping grass alive year around while balancing a full event schedule is another challenge. We pull cores twice a year, verticut at least once a month, and aerate monthly. Our fertilizer program is built around consistency as well. A foliar package is sprayed on Mondays before homestands, and a granular fertilizer is applied the Monday after. I preach consistency, not perfection. And I believe that shows.

— Ben Hartman, director of field operations

FIELD OF THE YEAR
PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL



Level and category of submission:

Professional Baseball

Field manager:

Ben Hartman

Title:

Director of field operations

Education:

A.A.S, Turfgrass Management

Original facility construction:

2019

Turfgrass:

Latitude 36 bermuda

Overseed:

365SS bluegrass at 4 lbs./1,000

Rootzone:

Sand

Drainage:

Subsurface perforated piping

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

Ben Hartman: I'm most proud of the consistency and commitment it represents. This award reflects the daily attention to detail, long hours, and pride our crew takes in the field — not just on game days, but year round. It's gratifying to see that dedication recognized, especially knowing the standard of fields across the industry.

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

Hartman: The biggest challenges have been balancing heavy use with maintaining field quality, along with managing weather extremes throughout the season. We've approached these challenges through proactive planning, open communication, and being willing to adjust as conditions change. Staying flexible and making data-driven decisions has been key. Another tidbit I like to add is the climate report for Wichita in 2025 that shows just how challenging it was of a year. Wichita experienced a very wet year in 2025, ending with a total rainfall of 40.45 inches (6.14 inches above average), significantly above the 30-year average. That made it one of the wettest years on record, particularly noted for its wet summer (June-August) and heavy rains in June — including a single-day total of 4.19 inches — which led to 49 tarp pulls, and one ripped tarp.

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?

Hartman: Our management approach is built around preparation, consistency and accountability. We focus heavily on preventative maintenance, proper cultural practices, and setting clear expectations for field performance. Attention to detail, along with willingness to evaluate and improve processes, has been essential in elevating the field to an award-winning level.





SFM: Please tell us about your crew, and anything else you would like us to know about your organization and the fields/facilities that you manage?

Hartman: This award truly belongs to our crew. They take tremendous pride in their work and consistently go above and beyond to ensure the field is safe, playable and visually outstanding. Our organization is supportive of best practices and continued education, which allows us to manage multiple fields and facilities to a high standard while continually striving to improve.

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?

Hartman: The application process was a great opportunity to reflect on our program and document the work that goes into maintaining the field. My advice to others would be to keep detailed records, take consistent photos throughout the season, and don't hesitate to apply. The process itself is valuable, and it's a great way to showcase the hard work of your crew and organization. **SFM**



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SPORTS FIELD
MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

SFMA has specific membership categories for every professional in the sports field management industry.

■ **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.

■ **Affiliate:** If you are indirectly or on a part-time basis involved in the maintenance/management of sports fields (coaches, athletic directors, volunteers, etc.).

■ **Academic:** If you are in teaching, extension or research.

■ **Student:** If you are a full-time student.

■ **Commercial:** If you work for a company engaged in a commercial enterprise providing services and/or products to the sports field management profession (consultants, architects, designers, contractors, management companies, distributors and manufacturers, etc.).

■ **Commercial associate:** If you are the second person (or more) from a commercial company (must first have an SFMA commercial member at their company before this lower-dues category can be selected).

■ **Retired:** If you are retired and no longer seeking full-time employment within the scope of activities of any SFMA membership category, and have been a member for a minimum of five years, you may become a non-voting member of SFMA and are not eligible to hold elective office.

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work, SFMA's advocacy with groups such as athletic directors, parks and recreation directors, coaches and parents enhances the image of the entire profession.

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■ 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.

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■ Opportunity to participate in volunteer leadership positions.

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JOHN MASCARO'S PHOTO QUIZ



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Answer on page 31

John Mascaro is president of Turf-Tec International

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The advertisement displays a collection of turf management tools. At the top, there are three red-handled tools: a vertical probe, a handheld device with a screen, and another vertical probe. Below these are a yellow handheld device, a yellow vertical probe, and a red-handled tool with a cylindrical base. The Turf-Tec International logo is at the top left, and the text 'TOOLS FOR MEASURING PLAYABILITY AND SAFETY' is at the top right. The contact information 'Turf-Tec International 800-258-7477 www.turf-tec.com' is at the bottom, along with a QR code and a 'Made in USA' logo.

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2026 SFMA CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION

THE 2026 SPORTS FIELD MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (SFMA) CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION was held January 18-22, 2026, in Fort Worth, offering attendees the opportunity to share information with other successful members of the sports field management industry. The sports field management industry's premier event featured education tracks, networking opportunities, a full trade show, SAFE fundraisers, the SFMA Student Challenge, Seminar on Wheels, and much more.

This year's keynote presentation featured SFMA leadership, who provided a recap of CEO Paula Sliefert's "Listening Tour," as well as an update on the future initiatives and plans for the organization. For full coverage of their discussion points, listen to the related podcast at <https://sportsfieldmanagementonline.com/podcast/> or wherever your favorite podcasts are found.

The opening general session "Inside the Pitch: Field Managers' Perspective on Preparing for FIFA World Cup 2026" provided an inside look at the preparation and operational demands faced by facilities participating in the upcoming FIFA event. The discussion explored key timelines, preparation milestones, and required work, as well as training facility and base-camp design, operational adjustments, and behind-the-scenes challenges. The conversation also examined the long-term legacy of these projects and their impact on sports field management. The session was moderated by John Sorochoan, Ph.D., and panelists included Weston Appelfeller, CSFM, Ryan Bjorn, Alan Ferguson, David Graham, Robert Heggie, Ewen Hodge, Tyler Morris, CSFM, John "Trey" Rogers, Ph.D., and John Wright, Jr.



The Women's Forum Luncheon featured an interactive format designed to spark conversation and connection. Through guided table discussions, shared stories, and built-in time for group exercises, attendees were provided opportunities to network, exchange ideas, and build meaningful relationships with peers across the industry.

Also during SFMA Conference, graduate students presented project posters highlighting either sports field management industry research or a case study that explains the project's purpose and significance.

SFMA once again featured the Seminar on Wheels tours during conference week. The full-day Seminar on Wheels toured Toyota Stadium (FC Dallas); Riders Field (Frisco RoughRiders); and Southern Methodist University. The half-day Seminar on Wheels toured AT&T Stadium (Dallas Cowboys) and Globe Life Field (Texas Rangers).

Additional highlights from the SFMA Conference are as follows:

2026 SFMA BOARD OF DIRECTORS TAKES OFFICE

The 2026 Sports Field Management Association (SFMA) Board of Directors took office during the association's Annual Meeting held during the conference. The 2026 SFMA Board of Directors is as follows:

OFFICERS:

- President: **Alpha Jones, CSFM**
- Immediate Past President: **Adam Thoms Ph.D.**
- President-Elect: **Casey Carrick, CSFM**



- Secretary/Treasurer: **Jason DeMink, CSFM**
- Commercial Vice President: **Matthew Duncan, CSFM**

RETURNING DIRECTORS:

- Director - Academic: **Weston Floyd, CSFM**
- Director - Professional Facilities: **Mitch Hooten**
- Director - Schools K-12: **Jake Mays, CSFM**

NEWLY ELECTED/APPOINTED DIRECTORS:

SFMA proudly welcomed the following professionals to its 2026 board of directors:

■ Director - Commercial: **Adam Russell, LEED AP**. Russell brings extensive field operations experience and a strong commitment to professional development and industry standards.

■ Director - Higher Education: **Joe Hill**. Hill is recognized for his leadership in sports facility management and dedication to advancing best practices in field performance and safety.

■ Director - At-Large (appointed): **Eric Harshman, CSFM, CGM**. Harshman contributes a background in turf systems management and collaborative industry engagement.

■ Director - At-Large (elected): **Ben Baumer, CSFM**. Baumer offers strategic insight and a data-informed approach to advancing sports field management outcomes.

■ Director - Parks and Recreation: **Tara Jordan**. Jordan brings a strong focus on member engagement and workforce development within the profession.

"These individuals bring exceptional expertise, innovation, and dedication to the sports field management community," said Alpha Jones, CSFM, president of SFMA. "Their leadership will help drive our mission forward and strengthen the resources and support we provide to our members worldwide."

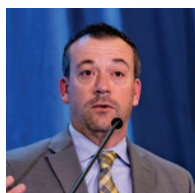
Together, the 2026 SFMA Board of Directors will focus on expanding professional development opportunities, enhancing industry standards, and supporting the growth and success of sports field managers worldwide.



2025 FOUNDERS AWARDS

SFMA recognized four distinguished leaders during its awards banquet, celebrating exceptional service, leadership and impact across the sports field management profession. The following individuals were named recipients of SFMA's highest honors, the Founders Awards:

- 2025 Dick Ericson Award: **Jimmy Simpson, CSFM**. Honored for steadfast leadership, strategic stewardship, and long-standing service advancing SFMA at the local, regional and national levels. Simpson's contributions to governance, financial oversight and professional development have strengthened the association and supported members through periods of significant change.



- 2025 Dr. William H. Daniel Award: **Geoff Rinehart**. Recognized for outstanding dedication to education, mentorship, and professional service. Rinehart's work connecting research, instruction, and field application has helped cultivate the next generation of sports field managers while elevating standards across the profession.



- 2025 George Toma Golden Rake Award: **Jason W. Bowers, CSFM**. Celebrated for excellence in field management and for advancing best practices through innovation, environmental stewardship, and professional advocacy. Bowers' leadership has strengthened operational standards and ex-



panded knowledge-sharing across the industry.

- 2025 Harry C. Gill Award: **Matt Anderson, CSFM**. Honored for exceptional mentorship and commitment to developing professionals within the industry. Anderson's influence is reflected in the many careers he has guided through education, service, and leadership.



"These honorees exemplify the professionalism, service, and vision that define sports field management," said SFMA President Alpha Jones, CSFM. "Their contributions continue to shape the profession, strengthen our community, and inspire future leaders."

The annual SFMA awards program recognizes individuals whose achievements advance the quality, safety, and professionalism of sports field management through leadership, education, innovation, and service.

SFMA STUDENT CHALLENGE

The 2026 SFMA Student Challenge recognized outstanding student achievement in sports field management, turf science, and facility operations. The SFMA Student Challenge is presented in partnership with the SAFE Foundation, founding partner Hunter Industries, and supporting sponsor Site-One Landscape Supply. The annual competition highlights emerging professionals who demonstrate excellence in research, problem-solving, and applied field management strategies. Participants presented comprehensive solutions addressing real-world field management scenarios. The 2026 SFMA Student Challenge winners are as follows:

2-YEAR WINNING TEAMS

■ **First-place:** Mt. San Antonio College, Team 202 — Leonardo Colon-Guembes, Edward Kardish, Tera Gavela and Andres Sanchez

■ **Second place:** Penn State University, Team 104 — Jaime Canal Campos, Augustus Holt, Tyler Bechtel and Ernesto Martinez

■ **Third place:** Mt. San Antonio College, Team 302 — Mandy Flaig Bernard, Kevin Pulido, Mayra Rubio and Brian Valencia

4-YEAR WINNING TEAMS

■ **First-place:** Penn State University, Team 203 — Wilson Kreitz, Joseph Lofland, Carter Marshall, and Jacob Straw

■ **Second place:** Michigan State University, Team 102 — Elijah Delany, Bailey Rank and Zach Flink



Photos on pages 22-23
by Mark Skalny





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FOLLOW HIS JOURNEY





Photos by Mark Skalny



■ **Third place:** Iowa State University, Team 301 — Matthew Hanten, Benjamin Kuiters, Logan McDonough and Hayden Spore

Winning teams were evaluated by a panel of industry professionals based on technical rigor, innovation, feasibility, and presentation quality. The first-place teams were awarded a \$5,000 prize to enhance the educational resources available to students interested in sports field management (either through the creation of an athletic sports field learning lab or for the purchase of athletic-sports-field-specific equipment and products).

“Each year, the Student Challenge demonstrates the exceptional talent entering our profession,” said Sarah Martin, CSFM, chair of the Student Challenge Committee. “These students represent the future of sports field management, bringing fresh perspectives and evidence-based solutions to the industry’s evolving challenges.”

SAFE FOUNDATION GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

The SAFE Foundation, the philanthropic arm of SFMA, announced the recipients of its 2025–26 grants and scholarships during the SFMA Annual Conference. The awards recognize outstanding achievement, leadership potential, and commitment to advancing the sports field management profession through education, professional development, and industry engagement. Through the generosity of donors and partners, the SAFE Foundation continues to invest in students and professionals whose work and studies strengthen the future of sports field management.

SAFE FOUNDATION GRANTS

■ Leo Goertz Membership Grants: **Alan Holland, MBA**, Town of Walkerton; and **Rex Zemke**, Wausau Schools

■ Gary Vanden Berg Internship Grant: **Benjamin Kuiters**, Iowa State University

SAFE SCHOLARSHIPS

■ Darian Daily Memorial Scholarship: **Paige Wildt**, Southeast Missouri State University

■ Paul Zwaska Scholarship: **Victor Abarca**, University of Florida

■ Dr. Fred Grau Memorial Scholarship (2-year): **Kaleb Meredith**, Penn State World Campus

■ Dr. James Watson Undergraduate Scholarship (2-year): **Aubree Faulkner**, Michigan State University

■ Dr. James Watson Undergraduate Scholarship (4-year): **Evan Dupuis**, Purdue University

■ SAFE Undergraduate Scholarships (4-year): **Benjamin Kuiters**, Iowa State University; and **Dante Filadoro**, UMass Amherst

■ Dr. James Watson Graduate Scholarship: **Ava Veith**, Penn State University

■ SAFE Graduate Scholarship: **Faishal Khan**, Washington State University

“The SAFE Foundation is honored to support these exceptional individuals whose academic achievement, dedication, and professional promise reflect the future strength of our industry,” said SAFE Foundation Board Chairman Matt Anderson, CSFM. “By investing in education and development, we are building a more capable and innovative sports field manager workforce.”

SAFE FUNDRAISERS

Teams came together for the SAFE Night of Bowling to compete for a chance to win prizes while raising money for the foundation. The top scorer was **Derek Hollanitsch** with a score of 206. The winning team included **Ben Boeding, CSFM, Marcus Campbell, Cody Pamperin, Ed Tietel** and **Derek Hollanitsch**.

The SAFE Cornhole Tournaments offered fun, friendly competition to support scholarships, grants, and research in the sports field management industry. The SAFE Cornhole winning team was **Josh Webber** and **Mason Modjeski**.

NEWLY CERTIFIED SPORTS FIELD MANAGERS (CSFM)

SFMA recognized seven professionals who earned the Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) designation during

Continued on page 28



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Continued from page 25

2025. The CSFM credential is a nationally respected standard that signifies comprehensive knowledge of sports turf science, safety protocols, environmental stewardship and operational excellence.

SFMA congratulates the following newly certified professionals:

- **John Knight, CSFM**
- **Jake Mays, CSFM**
- **Robbie Miller, CSFM**
- **Joseph Romano, CSFM**
- **Doug Trillo, CSFM**
- **Trenton Waters, CSFM**
- **Cole Walker, CSFM**

“Earning the CSFM designation demonstrates a deep commitment to excellence in sports field management,” said SFMA President Alpha Jones, CSFM. “These professionals uphold the highest standards of safety, playability, and performance for athletes and communities alike.”

CSFM recipients complete a rigorous certification process that evaluates technical knowledge, professional experience, and applied competencies in field construction, maintenance systems, risk management, and resource optimization. SFMA commended these individuals for their dedication to advancing the profession and enhancing the quality of sports fields nationwide.

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 winning products were as follows:

- **SGL** for its fLEX testing device
- **Firefly Automatix, Inc.** for its Autonomous Mowing Platform
- **Ventrac** for its EW530 Weedbine
- **Pure Seed** for its STRATIS with ACCe Technology



Photos by Mark Skalny

MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL SPORTS FIELD MANAGER OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Winners of the Minor League Baseball 2025 Head Groundskeeper of the Year Awards were recognized during the SFMA Awards Banquet. They are as follows:

- **Joey Stevenson**, Indianapolis Indians, International League, Triple-A Groundskeeper of the Year
- **Tony Lee**, Spokane Indians, Northwest League
- **Brian Soukup**, Salt Lake City Bees, Pacific Coast League
- **Matt Bergin**, Winston-Salem Dash, South Atlantic League
- **Dan Purner**, Somerset Patriots, Eastern League
- **Caleb Paullus**, Birmingham Barons, Southern League, Double-A Groundskeeper of the Year
- **Sean Cheng**, Stockton Ports, California League, California League, Single-A Groundskeeper of the Year

- **Darrell Lemmer**, Augusta Green Jackets, Carolina League
- **Jason Floyd**, Amarillo Sod Poodles, Texas League
- **Billy Gaylord**, St. Lucie Mets, Florida State League
- **Mitch Hooten**, West Michigan Whitecaps, Midwest League, High-A Groundskeeper of the Year

FIELD OF THE YEAR AWARDS

SFMA presented its 2025 Field of the Year awards, spotlighting the individuals and programs that excelled this year in providing quality, safe playing surfaces. The 2025 Field of the Year winners are as follows:

- Baseball - Professional: **Equity Bank Park**, Wichita Wind Surge - Ben Hartman and Jake Cooley.
- Baseball - Collegiate: Louisiana State University, **Alex Box Stadium at Skip Bertman Field** - Jordan Billingsley.
- Baseball - Schools and Parks: City of Bristol Parks & Rec, **Muzzy Field** - Doug Trillo, CSFM, CPSI, CTTW

- Football - Schools and Parks: **Windham School District, High School Football Field** - Robin Wilson
- Football - College: Christopher Newport University, **Kelchner Field** - Christopher Webb, CSFM
- Soccer - Professional: Kansas City Current, **CPKC Stadium** - Mira Adamek (Emma)
- Soccer - College: **LSU Soccer Field**, Louisiana State University - Jeremy Henderson.
- Soccer - Schools and Parks: **Walsh Field**, Pace Academy's Riverview Sports Complex - Daniel Prince
- Softball - Schools and Parks: Little Rock Christian Academy, **Warrior Softball Field** - Ryan Smith
- Softball - College: Florida Atlantic University, **Joan Joyce Field** - Max Wadsworth
- Sporting Grounds - Schools and Parks: Thomas Dale High School, **Ed Karpus Field** - Bryan Sheetz.



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SPORTSFIELD MANAGEMENT MAGAZINE RISING STAR AWARDS

Winners of the 2025 *SportsField Management* magazine Rising Star Awards were also recognized during the awards banquet. These awards highlight the best up-and-coming leaders in the sports field management industry. 2025 Rising Stars who were in attendance received their awards and joined *SportsField Management* magazine Associate Publisher John Kmitta (above center) on stage for a photo opportunity. The 2025 Rising Star Award winners are **C.J. Buck**, Harrell's (far left); **Justin Danelutt**, City of Oxford, Alabama (second from left); **Marcus Elswick**, University of Kentucky Athletics (second from right); **Mira Adamek**, KC Current (far right); and **Gage Knudson**, Los Angeles Football Club (not pictured).



NATIONAL TURFGRASS SCIENCE INVITATIONAL

During SFMA Conference, the National Turfgrass Science Invitational (NTSI) was held in conjunction with the national FFA competition at Texas Christian University. The event brought together 18 teams representing 72 students from 9 states for a comprehensive evaluation of technical turfgrass knowledge, practical skills, and industry readiness.

Participants engaged in hands-on technical stations, certification testing, facility tours, and professional development opportunities designed to connect classroom learning with real-world sports field and turf management practices.

The certification exam, delivered in partnership with iCEV, served as the written component of the competition and provided measurable benchmarking of technical competency.

NTSI RESULTS*:

■ Overall Individual Winner: With a score of 1107.685, **Boston Lawrence** from Wellington FFA.

■ Overall Team Champion: With a score of 4289.27, **Wellington FFA** (Wellington, Kansas) — Boston Lawrence, Ava Bales, Lily Morningstar and Rogan Wetta.

■ Second Place Team: With a score of 4076.28, **Avery County FFA** (Newland, North Carolina) — Aaron King, Deacon Holltsclaw, Eli Church and Finley Trivett.

■ Third Place Team: With a score of 3989.94, **Gila Ridge FFA Team 1** (Yuma, Arizona) — Gage Sullivan, Trent Karvoski, Gavin Schreiber and Blake Johnson.

*Certified results from Event Superintendent: Carson Nesbella, Ph.D. **SFM**

JOHN MASCARO'S PHOTO QUIZ



ANSWER

From page 19

These lines across the center of this multipurpose field appeared in the fall, about four months after this field was constructed. When the field was installed, 12 inches of a 12-inch-deep sandy loam soil rootzone was installed and then the field was sodded with large roll hybrid bermudagrass. The contract specified the turf for the install to be a particular variety of bermudagrass. After it was installed, the athletic field design and construction manager noticed a difference in the leaf texture on seven or eight rolls in the middle of the field, as some of the turf appeared to

have finer leaf blades. This photo was taken on October 30, right after the first cold snap of the season for this area. As you can see, the finer-textured bermudagrass turf began showing signs of dormancy while the rest of the field held a solid green color. As it turned out, a few rolls of the finer textured turf were mixed in with the specified turf when it was installed. The athletic field design and construction manager is taking this all in stride and looking forward to seeing how the different varieties will come out of dormancy and perform next year.

Photo Submitted by Galen Evans, athletic field design and construction manager at Montgomery Parks in Wheaton, 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 at john@turf-tec.com. If your photograph is selected, you will receive full credit. All photos become property of SportsField Management magazine and the Sports Field Management Association.

Staying on Track with Facility Maintenance

By Mary Helen Sprecher

Year after year, track and field remains among the top 10 most popular sports at the high school level, according to participation data from the National Federation of State High School Associations.

Although tracks and fields are two separate types of sports facilities, the fact that they are co-located means that responsibility for caring for both generally falls on the same person.

The question then becomes “Is the facility in meet-ready condition?” Seasons of use and exposure to weather can take their toll, say those who build and repair tracks for a living. And if the coach, athletic director or maintenance person is not aware of problems, things can quickly get out of hand.

“I think the school or coach should inspect the track weekly or every other week for the safety of the athletes,” said John Schedler of Baraka Sport in Fort Worth, Texas. “Taking photos of issues, even if they just look like minor concerns, can be very important. Get the questions into an expert’s hands to evaluate.

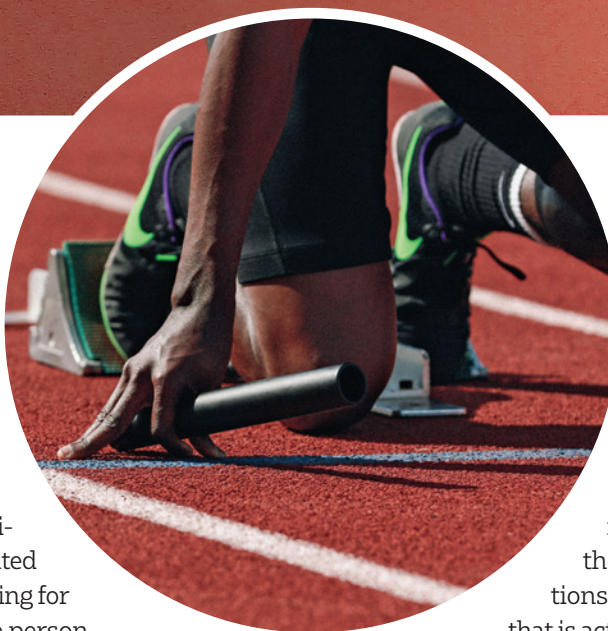


Photo courtesy Braden Collum on Unsplash

“Small issues become big problems if not identified early,” Schedler added. “Thanks to mobile phones, everyone has a camera in their back pocket.”

Regular walk-throughs can reveal any number of problems in the making. However, those inspections are only as good as the attention that is actually paid to the track throughout the time spent there.

Schedler recommends a checklist of items to look for:

■ **Delamination or any movement or change at the edges of the track.** “Sometimes, track systems can pull and relax with temperature fluctuation, and that can really cause issues with the surface.”

■ **Bubbles on the surface.** “Moisture and heat can cause sealed or solid systems to bubble.”

■ **Surface fading.** “Chalking is the common term for situations where polyurethane fades and becomes dusty looking. In some systems, the rubber granules on the surface will start to come off or detach at a frustrating rate. There



Photo courtesy
Steven Lelham
on Unsplash

may also be bald spots or areas where the texture has changed noticeably.”

■ **Striping wear.** “This can be caused by the fading or wear of the track system, which can make it appear as though the striping is disappearing.”

■ **Uneven areas of the track.** Contractors advise owners and managers to look down the length of the track from each bend. Does the surface appear flat and even, or are you noticing what appear to be waves, or rises and falls, in the track? Also, if water gets on the track, does it collect in a puddle somewhere? In all cases, take photos of problem areas and send them to the track installer or contractor. Pros advise against looking up problems on the internet and trying DIY fixes; some may void the warranty and/or make the problem worse.

In addition to keeping on top of changes in the track, there are things to be aware of that can shorten the lifespan of the surface.

■ **Encroaching grass or weeds.** “The most destructive maintenance issue we see that is frequently overlooked until it is too late is vegetative growth at the edge of the track that undermines the surface,” said Robert Cohen,

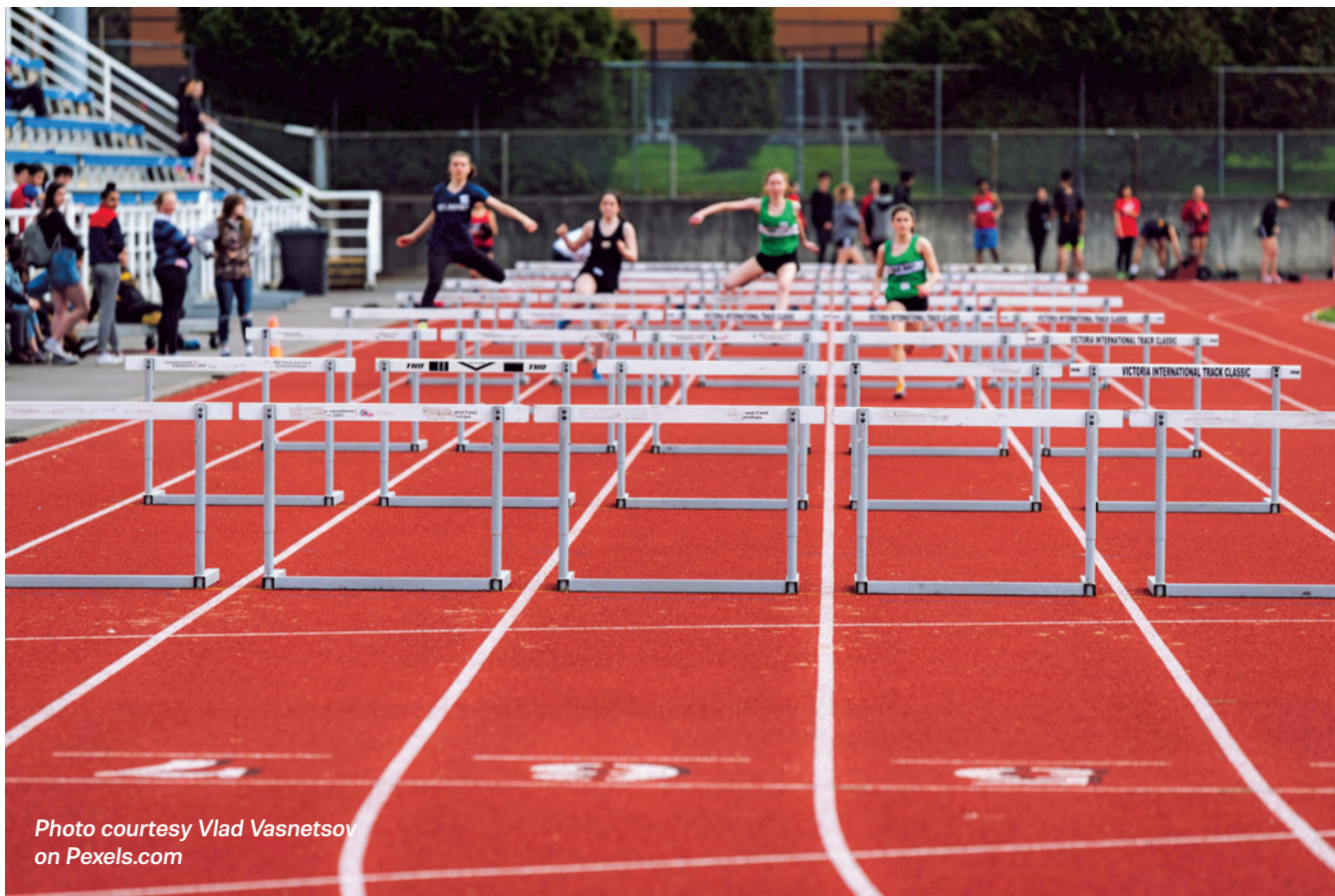


Photo courtesy Vlad Vasnetsov
on Pexels.com



Photo courtesy Lukas
Hartmann on Pexels.com

of Robert Cohen Co., LLC Sport Surfaces Distributing, Inc. in Bernalillo, New Mexico. “Once weeds and grass become established, they embed themselves into the asphalt and become impossible to eliminate. Regular application of a spray herbicide at least annually, and also as weeds appear, will add years to the life of the track.”

■ **Wear caused by gates that sag and drag across the surface.** Inspect regularly and repair all gateways that lead into the track area.

■ **Runners grinding debris into the surface.** A leaf blower can help remove dirt, sand, gravel, twigs or anything else that might accidentally be brought into the track area on users’ shoes. Matting or grates near the entrances can assist with removal of debris from shoes.

■ **Use of incorrect footwear.** Running shoes, such as those made for jogging, will not damage the track surface. If athletes want to wear spikes on the track, however, only the pyramid type should be allowed. Shoes with sharp spikes (either pin spikes or Christmas tree spikes) can damage the track surface and cause premature wear; that damage may not be covered by the manufacturer’s warranty.

■ **Heavy machinery on the track.** Track installers can't say it enough; if equipment such as mowers or any other vehicle needs to be brought onto the field, covering the track is imperative, and will help keep the surface intact. Many schools or facilities place boards over the track at crossing points for machinery or vehicles; the boards are then covered by rubber mats to provide traction. If the field will be used to host anything not sports-related (graduations, community events, etc.), pedestrian traffic should be directed onto the field only at those designated crossing points.

■ **Aggressive cleaning of the surface.** Ask the installer for a list of the manufacturer's recommendations regarding equipment and products that can safely be used on the surface, as well as directions on how to use them correctly.

■ **Excess water on the track.** Sprinklers for irrigating the field should be directed so that water goes only onto the grass, rather than over-spraying and landing on the track. If there are integrated curbing/drainage systems between the track and the field, make sure they remain clear of any debris, so that water is moved off efficiently.

■ **Unsupervised facility use.** It is easier to maintain control of footwear and other issues if track use is confined to student athletes; however, many facilities are open for community use. This increases the risk to the facility as a whole. Children, for example, will often bring tricycles, scooters, bikes, etc., onto the track while their parents walk or run, or users will allow their dogs to run on the field, none of which is desirable. If tracks (and fields) are open to the community (or even just to the rest of the student body while the track and field are not in active use), post a clear list of rules regarding hours open, footwear allowed, etc. Provide a number or email so that users can alert you if there are any issues with the track surface (or the field, should they notice problems there). **SFM**

Mary Helen Sprecher wrote this article on behalf of the American Sports Builders Association (ASBA). For more information, see the ASBA's Running Tracks: Construction and Maintenance Manual (www.sportsbuilders.org).



Photo courtesy Dylan Yarbrough on Unsplash



Photo courtesy Fisher Tracks, Inc.

FIELD TESTED

University of Tennessee's turfgrass students are growing careers on the global stage

By Brian Canever



The sun has barely crept up over the horizon at the University of Tennessee (UT) AgResearch and Education Center, a 200-acre tract of land just south of the Knoxville campus where plant and soil science students are at work doing research that, quite literally, touches the world. The sound of a lawnmower firing in the distance breaks the silence. Before long, Rose Gibbons, a turfgrass science and management undergraduate who spent the summer interning at the center, rides out, ready to do her morning's labor.

Small plots of various species of grass are set up for UT turfgrass science professors to study. Gibbons, a transfer student from Illinois, worked in commercial landscaping before moving to Knoxville and realizing that she had moved only a few miles from one of North America's most elite turfgrass education programs. Two years into her studies, she's already completed internships with Major League Baseball's Baltimore Orioles and helped to prepare the field at Orlando's Inter & Co Stadium for this past summer's FIFA Club World Cup 2025.

Rose Gibbons, University of Tennessee turfgrass science and management undergraduate, at the UT Institute of Agriculture's East Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center's turf research and development facilities. All photos provided by University of Tennessee

As Gibbons finishes her mowing, trading one piece of equipment for another, the morning's rays shine on a building behind her that is proof of how highly UT is regarded in this discipline.

"That's the FIFA building," said Gibbons, who helped install and maintains the plots of grass inside. This is the testing ground for the playing surfaces that billions of people will see when the men's FIFA World Cup 26 kicks off in North America. Gibbons and about 15 other UT undergraduates are involved with a long list of research and performance activities, from testing for ball bounce, grass color, and player safety, to

simulating traffic and indoor stadium conditions for surfaces that will host 104 matches across 16 stadiums in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. It's hard, daunting work.

"But it's also about the most fun you can have while getting paid," said Gibbons.

"We're a hidden gem," said Brandon Horvath, Ph.D., one of a core of four professors in the UT turfgrass program. Horvath recently took the reins as the undergraduate coordinator from Distinguished Professor of Turfgrass Science and Management John Sorochan, Ph.D., who is leading the research project for FIFA. "A few years ago, we worked with an advertising agency and the first thing they told us was, 'Nobody knows about you.'"

But they should. Besides the university's collaboration with FIFA to develop the field surfaces for the Club World Cup last summer and FIFA World Cup 26, UT's teaching, research and Extension faculty — which includes Horvath, Sorochan, Jim Brosnan, Ph.D., and Becky Bowling, Ph.D. — has placed students at the Super Bowl and the Masters at Augusta National, among many other prestigious locations. A December 2025 alumnus from New Jersey, Andrew Evans, interned with the Philadelphia Eagles — his favorite pro football team — and worked at Super Bowl LIX in New Orleans.

The result of these prestigious internships is evident in the program's 100-percent job placement rate. According to a network map that Bowling updates regularly, there are hundreds of UT turfgrass alumni presently working across 17 states in golf courses, parks and recreation departments, and for sports teams.

"Very few people understand the level of science and depth of knowledge it takes to maintain a world-championship-level golf course or soccer pitch," said Horvath. "But at UT, that's what we've always sought to teach our students."

The expertise they gain during their undergraduate years opens a wealth of career opportunities. Take for example, Ivan Navarrette, who came to UT from nearby Loudon,



Tennessee, and earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in plant sciences. FIFA representatives were so impressed with Navarrette when he was a student working on the AgResearch Farm that they offered him a job as a stadium pitch operations supervisor in Mexico ahead of the FIFA World Cup 26 tournament. And there are numerous other areas in which graduates make an impact every day.

"The turfgrass industry has five major sectors," said Bowling. "Golf, sports turf, seed and sod production, community turf, and lawn and landscape. Nationally, we're estimated to contribute approximately \$60 billion to \$100 billion to the economy. UT students and alumni play a role in every facet of that contribution."

UT's alumni are also prominent in academia. Master's and Ph.D. graduates of UT at high-intensity research universities include Adam Thoms (MS '08, Ph.D. '15) at Iowa State, Jay McCurdy (MS '08) at Mississippi State, and Matthew Elmore (MS '11, Ph.D. '14) at Rutgers.

Conlan Burbrink (BS '20) earned a master's degree at Texas A&M before returning for his Ph.D. studies in 2022 under Sorochan, who was his undergraduate mentor. While at UT, the Cincinnati native has worked the Super Bowl, the Cricket World Cup, and interned with the Cincinnati Reds Urban Youth Academy, Orlando City Soccer Club, and Surrey County Cricket Club in England. From a research perspective, he's curious about two areas: growing grass indoors, particularly the effect of light and color, and how the field of turfgrass science can be advanced through data analytics.

"Turfgrass isn't just growing grass — it's how the athlete interacts with it, how the environment interacts with it," said Burbrink. "I'm using statistical techniques that aren't typically used in agronomics, like machine learning and AI, to answer more complex questions about turf performance."

Burbrink was on the pitch in Qatar for the 2022 World Cup tournament, where the heat was so stifling that large air conditioning units



Brandon Horvath, Ph.D.,
University of Tennessee
professor



Becky Bowling, Ph.D.,
University of Tennessee
assistant professor,
extension specialist, and
co-principal investigator



Conlan Burbrink, University
of Tennessee graduate
research assistant and
Ph.D. candidate



Rhys Fielder, University of
Tennessee research lead
and master's student

had to be custom-built for FIFA spectators and players. The men's FIFA tournament will be hosted in 2030 by six countries — Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Spain, Portugal, and Morocco — and four years later will be held in Saudi Arabia. Because Burbrink's research is future-focused, the FIFA research project is an incredible opportunity to test hypotheses about indoor grass conditions that may benefit the organization for years to come.

"There's no facility in turfgrass that compares to what we have on the AgResearch farm," said Burbrink. "It's completely enclosed, no natural light, so that we can answer both practical and physiological questions. FIFA's support to build that building and conduct this research allows us to further turfgrass science as a discipline."

Bowling, a co-principal investigator on the FIFA research project, coordinates field research days, where faculty from UT and Michigan State University convene with pitch managers from each host venue and FIFA's pitch management team. The events have provided a unique opportunity for UT's students to be a part of global work with real-life outcomes.

"These are high-profile international events that we help facilitate on behalf of FIFA, and the scale and visibility require an all-hands-on-deck approach," said Bowling. "Our students consistently rise to meet that challenge."

Most exciting for Bowling and Horvath has been watching students step into leadership roles on the FIFA research collaboration. Rhys Fielder earned his bachelor's

degree in turfgrass science and management from UT in 2019. During that time, faculty members helped him land an internship with English Premier League club Arsenal. After graduating, he enrolled in the master's program and currently serves as the research lead for the FIFA project.

"Before working on a golf course, I had no idea turfgrass even existed as a profession," said Fielder. "I knew someone came in and mowed the grass. But the sophistication behind it was mind blowing."

Said Horvath, "There are many programs out there that tell students to wait until their junior year to take an internship. But you've got to get experience working in different settings, under different managers, to learn about yourself and what you like. John [Sorocean] says, 'Work like labor and think like management.' This is a management degree, and it requires critical thinking and problem-solving skills. When you leave our program, you're ready to lead."

Gibbons, who was unsure of what she wanted to do with her life between finishing community college and moving to Tennessee, is now president of the Tennessee Turf Club. She's enjoying working on the hybrid grass system, and is championing the message of "safe and uniform playing surfaces" that the FIFA project emphasizes. She expects to enroll in the master's program after graduating this fall.

"There are so many benefits to being here," said Gibbons. "I get to be outside and work with people I like. Our professors can connect us with any turfgrass person in the world in a five-minute phone call. The sky really is the limit." **SFM**

Emotional Intelligence

In sports field management, we understand stolons better than most. They stretch across the ground, finding new space, creating new growth, and influencing everything around them. Leadership works the same way. Every habit you model — your tone, your decisions, your reactions — moves through your team with that same reach. And that's exactly why emotional intelligence matters more than most leaders realize.

Emotional intelligence or emotional quotient (EQ) is about being steady when everything around you is shifting. In a profession built on uncontrollable variables — weather patterns, event schedules, budget pressure, and demands from coaches or administrators — the crew takes emotional cues from the person in charge. EQ becomes the difference between a group that reacts and a team that responds.

When you look at EQ through real-time moments, its impact becomes obvious. A storm delay hits, the tournament director wants answers, half the plan has just changed, and your phone won't stop buzzing. This is where emotional intelligence shows up. Self-awareness stops your frustration from landing on someone who didn't cause the problem. Self-management keeps you calm when the game schedule gets flipped for the third time. Social awareness helps you notice when a team member is shutting down instead of speaking up. Relationship management guides how you give direction when everyone else is spiraling.

Anybody can lead when the day is smooth. Emotional intelligence is leadership under pressure.

As EQ increases, the culture around you starts shifting almost automatically, because crew culture grows from the leader. You can't "announce" a healthy culture — you create one through your daily behavior. When you "own" your mistakes, your team feels safe owning theirs. When you explain the "why," people stop guessing and start engaging. When you correct

respectfully instead of publicly embarrassing someone, loyalty grows. When you stay composed during chaos, the entire crew learns that pressure doesn't get the final say.

And you will never build that through speeches alone. You build it through consistency. What you live becomes normal. What you praise becomes repeated. What you tolerate becomes culture. In sports field management, where the job doesn't always allow for perfect conditions, you need a culture that bends without snapping — EQ is the foundation for that.

This matters even more in today's workforce. We're leading teams made up of different generations, backgrounds, and levels of experience. And although a lot of people blame "kids these days" or complain about changing expectations, the truth is that everyone performs better when communication is clear, respect is mutual, and the emotional thermostat is steady.

What makes EQ so valuable is that it's a learnable skill that grows slowly, consistently, and with daily care. You see the impact clearly in high-pressure stories. Think of a multi-field soccer showcase weekend: rain dumps on the complex on Friday afternoon, coaches start panicking, parents are arriving in town, and the schedule is now a moving target. The sports field manager gathers the crew quickly, lays out clear roles, communicates updates to the stakeholders, and stays calm through every step. Because they stayed steady, the entire team followed their energy, games were saved, and fields recovered. That's EQ in action.

And leadership doesn't turn off when you clock out; it follows you. When you grow EQ at work, your home benefits. When you grow it at home, your crew benefits.

Improvement doesn't have to be complicated. Start with small, daily shifts. Check your emotional temperature before you give instructions. If you are irritated, pause before responding. Acknowledge people's feelings before giving direction. And at the end of each day, ask yourself if your behavior helped or hurt the culture.

EQ determines whether your crew grows stronger or just survives the season. In sports field management, where conditions change fast and expectations stay high, EQ becomes the competitive edge that outlasts weather, budgets, and even job titles. If you want a

healthier culture, a tighter crew, and smoother seasons, start growing the stolon that affects everything else — your emotional intelligence. **SFM**



Alpha Jones, CSFM, is athletic field specialist at Duke University. He is also president of the Sports Field Management Association. He can be reached via email at morthangrass@gmail.com

Spreaders and Sprayers

BOBCAT BROADCAST SPREADER

The Bobcat broadcast spreader is designed for fast, reliable material distribution across large areas. The attachment offers adjustable speed and gate controls for spreading salt, sand, seed or fertilizer. Its rust-resistant poly hopper and sealed electronics ensure durability, while custom wiring harnesses integrate with utility vehicles, compact tractors and Toolcat utility work machines. This broadcast spreader is ideal for winter maintenance and all-season tasks.



CAMPEY TURF CARE SYSTEMS HIGHLIGHTS

MARTIN LISHMAN MICRO-SPRAY

Campey Turf Care Systems introduced the upgraded Martin Lishman Micro-Spray, a versatile self-propelled pedestrian sprayer designed for sports pitches, golf courses and landscaped areas. Key features include a 150-liter tank and a 2.5m folding boom with six nozzles across three sections, enabling effective and adaptable spraying. Independent shut-off nozzle bodies and reduced drift air inclusion nozzles help minimize waste and ensure precise coverage. Its slim profile



and low center of gravity offer easy maneuverability and stability on uneven ground. Optional accessories — such as a hand lance and bout marker — enhance flexibility for spot treatments. Operators benefit from a refined control box with customizable motor direction, 12 speed settings, bout marker selection, and a battery level indicator — all in one place. The Micro-Spray exemplifies practical engineering and intelligent design for efficient, high-quality turf care.

FERRIS VENTURE X

The Ferris Venture X marries ease of use and maintenance with operator comfort, resulting in optimal performance.

Venture X features Ferris' corrosion-resistant suspension system, a stainless-steel platform and new comfort knee pads. The added 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 golf-industry-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, providing ready access to the engine for maintenance.



GKB SANDSPREADER FROM STEC

When time and personnel are limited, efficient and effective equipment is a must. Topdressing is arguably the most common practice in any maintenance program, but a quality topdresser or spreader can make all the difference. The GKB Sandspreader distributes sand or other materials accurately and efficiently. Using its various settings, the operator can tailor the speed and spread to the needs of the surface. The balloon tires on the Sandspreader aid in



preventing compaction, and allow the Sandspreader to be towed across delicate surfaces without causing damage. The large hopper capacity makes this unit a gamechanger for those who need to cover large or multiple areas. The Sandspreader is available as a towed or UTV-mounted unit and can be fitted with a side discharge conveyor to deliver sand to other equipment or more exact locations. This machine is available in several sizes and configurations.

JOHN DEERE PROGATOR PRECISIONSPRAYERS

Built with a focus on operator precision and machine dependability, the 2026 ProGator 2020A and 2030A GPS PrecisionSprayers feature technology upgrades and design enhancements that strengthen connectivity and overall reliability. Equipped with the new StarFire 7500 receiver and optional SF-RTK correction signal, these models deliver up to 1-inch horizontal accuracy without requiring additional hardware adjustments. By leveraging four satellite constellations, which provide a 100% increase in coverage, the updated receivers offer greater accuracy, faster signal



pull-in times, and consistent season-to-season repeatability. Connectivity has also been enhanced through the transition to JDLink M modems, giving customers the same dependable connection without the need for an external antenna. From a design standpoint, future models will feature an upgraded boom harness-to-valve connector, further improving the durability and reliability of spray system performance.

LESCO BATTERY-POWERED SELF-PROPELLED SPREADER

The LESCO battery-powered self-propelled spreader from SiteOne helps sports field managers apply granular products with greater consistency and less physical strain. Designed for efficiency across large athletic complexes, this 80-pound-capacity spreader combines battery-powered propulsion with precision distribution to support reliable turf performance. The self-propelled drive reduces operator fatigue while maintaining a steady pace for uniform coverage. Constructed with a durable stainless-steel frame and corrosion-resistant hopper, it is built to withstand frequent use in demanding environments. The adjustable handle provides maximum comfort, while intuitive controls make operation straightforward for crews of all experience levels. Its multi-hole drop system is engineered for best-in-class accuracy with 75-300 SGN fertilizer products, helping ensure consistent material distribution. Measuring 48 x 25 x 35 inches, the unit provides stability and maneuverability across athletic fields. By pairing battery-powered mobility with LESCO's trusted spreader engineering, this unit helps sports field managers complete applications efficiently and accurately.



MILWAUKEE TOOL M18 4-GALLON BACKPACK SPRAYER WITH SWITCH TANK

The M18 4-gallon backpack sprayer with Switch Tank delivers pressure control with no manual pumping and an interchangeable tank design. Designed to meet the needs of professional landscape maintenance, the battery-powered



backpack sprayer provides instant, constant and adjustable pressure up to 140 psi and a 24-foot vertical spray distance. The five-mode flow rate knob adjusts the flow by 0.1 – 0.52 gpm, giving users the capability to complete a wide range of applications. The M18 Redlithium XC4.0 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.

SCAG TURF STORM AND TURF STORM XL

The Scag 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 pro-



ductivity. With right-sized liquid (30 or 60 total gallons) and dry/granular (120 or 220 pound) capacities, the Turf Storm and Turf Storm XL 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 you to reach tough spots. A 23-hp. Vanguard engine delivers ample power, and the machine's 50-amp charging system ensures dependable spreader operation and battery life. The units feature a 2-year commercial warranty.

STEEL GREEN MANUFACTURING SGXL AND SG54 SPRAYERS

Steel Green Manufacturing announced that Opti-Rate, the company's advanced rate-controlled spray system, comes standard on all 2026 SGXL and SG54 machines. The company debuted Opti-Rate in May 2025 as an optional accessory. Since then, it has helped numerous operators make the most of their spray applications. The Opti-Rate system eliminates over- and under-application using pulse width modulation rate control technology, with the added benefit of turn compensation. It also independently controls flow and pressure to maintain a uniform droplet size, lets operators monitor and adjust their rate easily via an intuitive display, and allows operators to slow down and take their time in tight areas, without the fear of burning turf. In addition to Opti-Rate becoming standard, all 2026 SGXL and SG54 machines also feature a new spray tank design, which adds a lip to minimize spills and fill markings for precise readings.



TORO MULTI PRO TURF SPRAYERS

Toro Multi Pro turf sprayers use an advanced spray system design, combined with cutting-edge sprayer controls and productive vehicle features to create efficient, accurate sprayers. From aggressive agitation, faster response, consistent and precise application rates, and intuitive rate set up, the Multi Pro turf sprayer series has it all. The Multi Pro comes in three models: the 175-gallon 1750 turf sprayer, the 200-gallon WM turf sprayer and the 300-gallon 5800



gasoline-powered turf sprayer. The 175- and 300-gallon models feature GeoLink Spray RTK GNSS technology. This smart system knows the user's precise location. By automatically turning individual nozzles on and off, overlaps are virtually eliminated, resulting in substantial product savings. Operators only need to map out the application area once, and the data will be saved for future applications.

TURFCO T5000 SPREADER/SPRAYER

The Turfco T5000 is built for the whole field, thanks to a 60-gallon sprayer and a 325-pound spreader capacity. Coupled with a 23-hp. engine, it delivers speeds up to 7 mph. Accurately match up with the next pass using the intuitive steering wheel drive system and get unshakable stability on hills, eliminate turf-tearing, and reduce training time — new operators will be rolling in less than a week. The two-nozzle boomless system delivers a spray width of 13 feet, and the design also makes it more nimble than spray booms by letting operators glide past obstacles such as signposts and landscaping without slowing down. Add on the T-Flex15 tank and you can cover up to 300,000 square feet per fill and get the most productive applicator on the market.

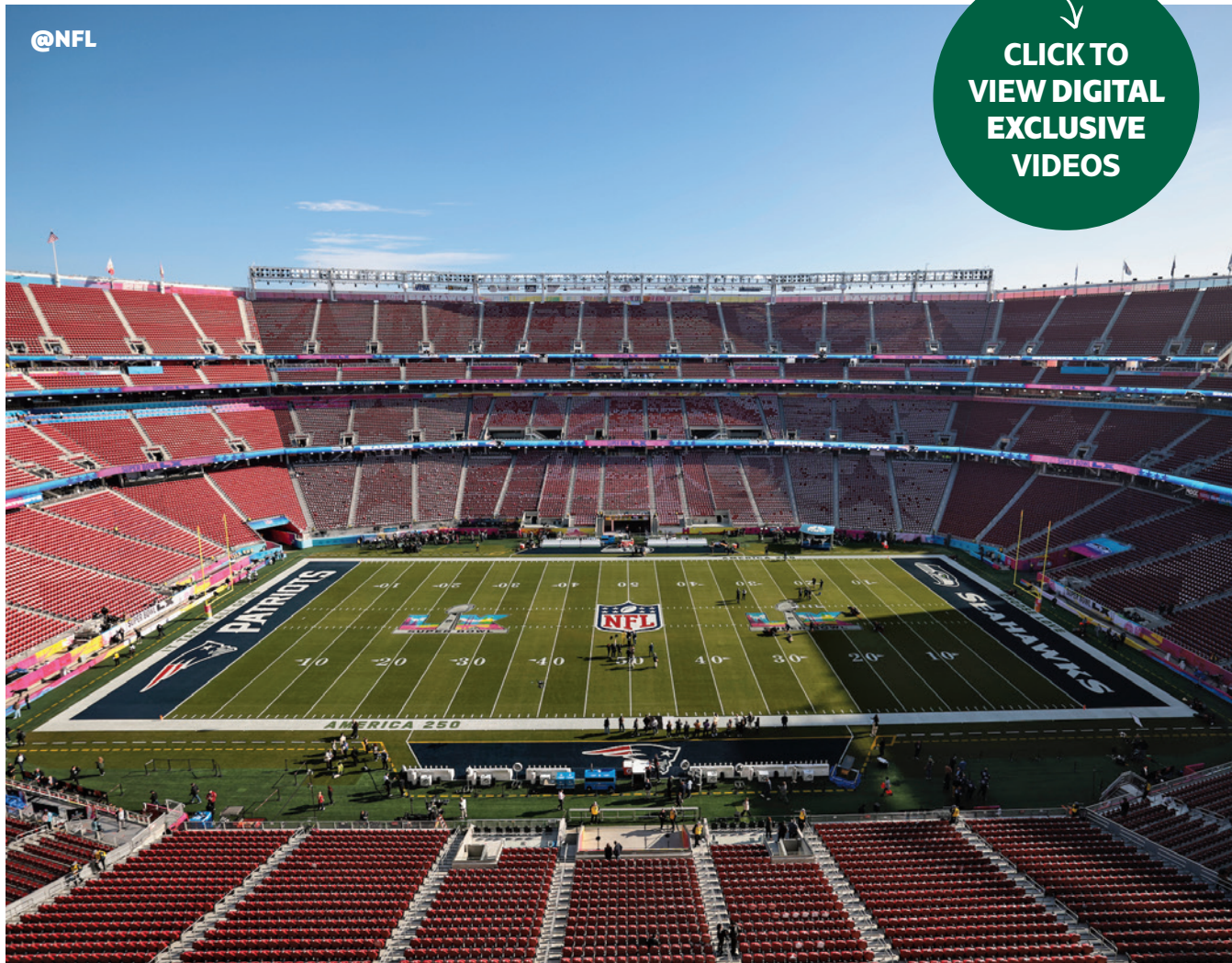


Z TURF Z-SPRAY MAX SPREADER/SPRAYER

With a 10-foot spray boom and 60-gallon tank, the 2026 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. A contoured operator pad and revised control layout provide increased comfort and economy of motion, while larger drive tires deliver a smoother ride. The patented magnetic operator pad removes easily, without tools, for access to the spray chart, or for maintenance, while a patented flip-up hopper eases hopper cleaning and engine access. **SFM**

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(L-R: Geoff Rinehart and Jason Bowers)

Geoff Rinehart:
University of Maryland Turfgrass instructor, Extension Agent and MASFMA Board member received the National Dr. William Daniel Founders Award

Jason Bowers:
CSFM and MASFMA past president received the National George Toma Golden Rake Award



@MidAtlanticSFMA



@FieldExperts

Join us in wishing a Happy 97th birthday to SFMA Founder George Toma!



@VTTurfTeaching

Very proud of @VTTurfgrass students Tyler Hordych, Chas Dibbern, @DHens_2, & Brady Pollard representing our program in the @FieldExperts 2026 Student Challenge. And a BIG THANK YOU to @VirginiaSFMA for their generous support of our students in this industry opportunity!



@ASUGroundsCrew



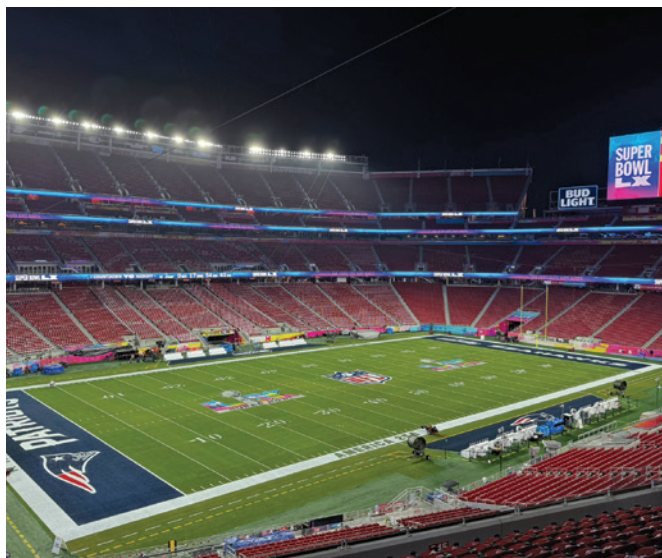
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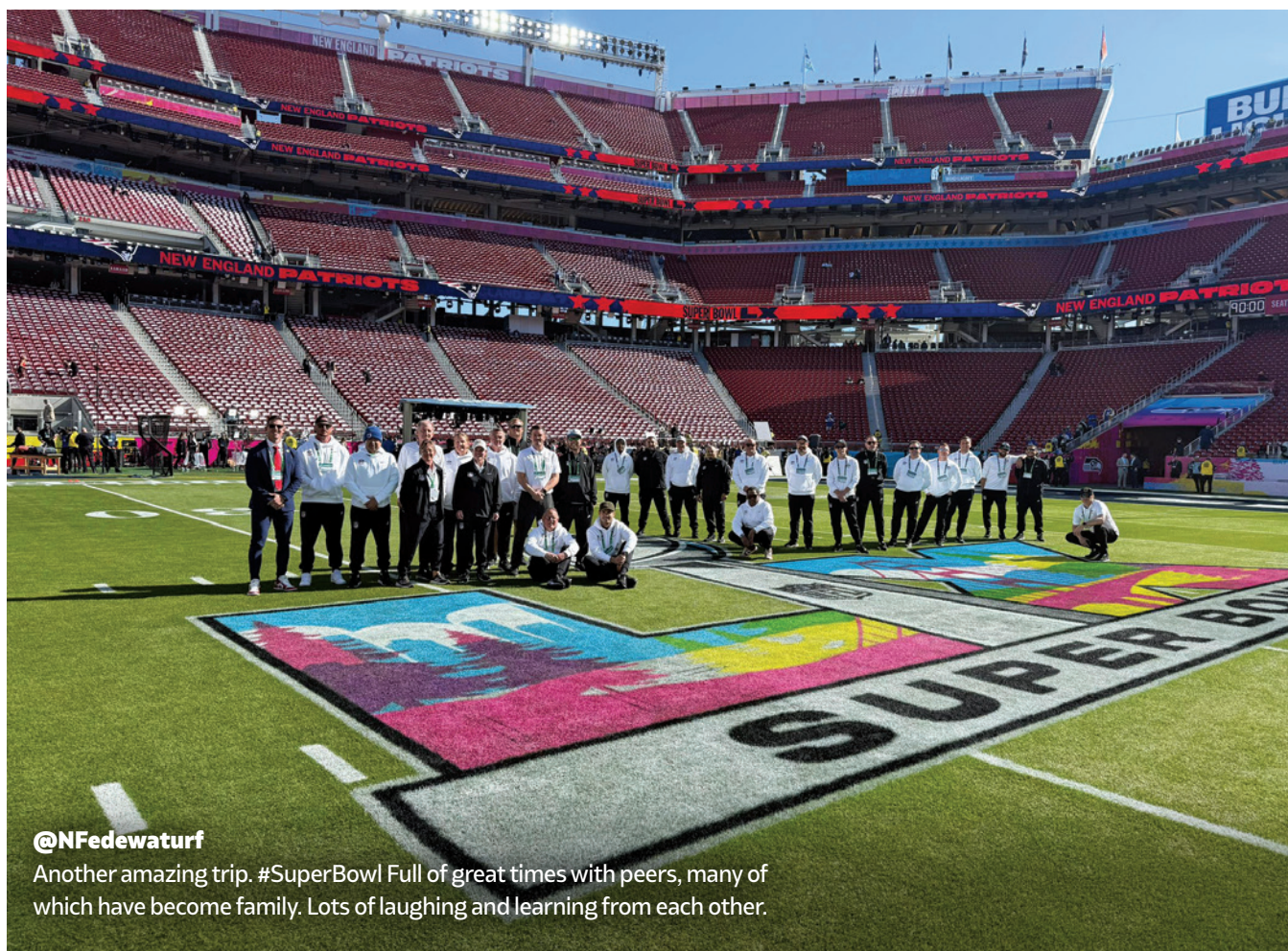
@NPappas23

After a week of rehearsals & non-stop use we had Saturday to get the #SuperBowl field dialed back in & ready for kickoff. Lucky to work w/ such an amazing crew. Proud of the effort we brought to this game.



@VAturf

Very appreciative of those that joined @VTTurfTeaching & me in a Turfgrass Math session at @FieldExperts #SFMA2026. 1st & 2nd place winners in the Kahoot Math Challenge were @TampChamp from the Seattle Mariners organization & Mt San Antonio's Samantha Osorio-Huerta. Congrats!



@NFedewaturf

Another amazing trip. #SuperBowl Full of great times with peers, many of which have become family. Lots of laughing and learning from each other.



@Groundsjeremyj



@joshdejongcsfm

Great week at SFMA Fort Worth Texas, so many old and new friends

2026

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Providence, Rhode Island

www.nertf.org

MARCH 11-12

REINDERS 27TH TURF CONFERENCE

Waukesha, Wisconsin

<https://www.reinders.com/turf-conference/>

JUNE 23-25

NATIONAL SPORTS SAFETY AND SECURITY CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION

Palm Desert, California

<https://ncs4.usm.edu/events/annual-conference/>



SEPTEMBER 29-OCTOBER 1

2026 NRPA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

<https://conference.nrpa.org/>

OCTOBER 20-23

EQUIP EXPO

Louisville, Kentucky

<https://www.equipexposition.com/>

OCTOBER 20-23

TRANSFORM, THE PGMS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Louisville, Kentucky

<https://pgms.org/page/2025AnnualConf>

NOVEMBER 8-11

ELEVATE (NALP)

Tampa, Florida

<https://www.landscapeprofessionals.org/ELEVATE>

NOVEMBER 11-12

SALTEX 2026

Birmingham, UK

www.saltex.org.uk

DECEMBER 1-4

AMERICAN SPORTS BUILDERS ASSOCIATION TECHNICAL MEETING

Tampa, Florida

<https://sportsbuilders.org/page/UpcomingEvents>

DECEMBER 7-10

IRRIGATION SHOW AND EDUCATION WEEK

Las Vegas, Nevada

<https://irrigation.org/IA>

2027

FEBRUARY 1-4

SFMA CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION

Tampa, Florida

<https://www.sportsfieldmanagement.org/conference/>

FEBRUARY 14-17

TPI 2026 INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE AND FIELD DAY

Amelia Island, Fernandina Beach, Florida

<https://turfgrassod.org/event/tpi-2026-international-education-conference/> **SFM**

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Colorado SFMA: www.csfma.org

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(dan@rafttriversod.com)

Iowa SFMA: www.iowastma.org

Kentucky Sports Field Management Association:
www.kysfma.org

Keystone Athletic Field Managers Org.
(KAFMO): www.kafmo.org

Mid-Atlantic SFMA: www.masfma.org

Michigan SFMA: www.misfma.org

Minnesota Park and Sports Field Management
Association: www.mpsfma.org

Mo-Kan STMA: <https://mokansfma.org/>

Nebraska SFMA:
<https://nebraskaturfgrass.com/about-nesfma>

New England STMA: www.nestma.org

North Carolina SFMA: <https://ncsfma.org/>

Northern California SFMA: www.norcalstma.org

Ohio Turfgrass Foundation: www.ohioturfgrass.org

Oklahoma STMA: oksfmasecretary@gmail.com

Oregon STMA: www.oregonsportsturfmanagers.org
or oregonstma@gmail.com

Ozarks STMA: Derek Edwards
(dedwards@springfieldcardinals.com)

Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey:
www.sfmanj.org

Southern California SFMA: www.socalsfma.com

South Carolina SFMA: www.scsfma.org

Tennessee Valley SFMA: www.tvstma.org

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Infield Restoration

Q: The mission of our group is to provide affordable baseball opportunities for kids. Our fields are used almost daily by several youth teams and support dozens of local families each week. The infields are almost entirely clay and are in rough condition. After even light rain, the surface turns into thick mud and can take days to dry out. This often forces canceled practices and creates inconsistent and sometimes unsafe footing for the kids. The volunteers do everything they can, including dragging regularly. We know we are likely missing smarter and more sustainable, science-based solutions. Any guidance you can provide would make a meaningful difference. If there is an opportunity for a university student to use our field as part of a research project, we would love to provide a real-world site that benefits both students and our community.

A: While this email question was edited to reduce its length, the reader can still get a sense of their passion for the kids using this facility. It was clear that the fields have great importance for positive support of the kids, and that the fields have become an important community hub. It did not provide an indication of their budget, but in most community fields, it is often between zero and whatever parents are willing to contribute. Unfortunately, these situations often require significant renovations to make significant improvements.

As a university faculty, one of the most frequent question themes I get each year is “Can your students come out and renovate my turfgrass area?” There is this notion that turfgrass majors in college do not get any practical work experience outside the classroom during their time in school, which is very far from the truth. In support of those that ask, some do offer to pay the students or donate to their turfgrass club, and in a few instances the students have turned a request into a club fundraiser.

As for the problem at hand, infields are often harder to manage than the turfgrass. Internal drainage is usually at a minimum, so surface drainage is desirable. Getting a good mix with proper proportions of sand, silt and clay can go a long way toward management ease, but community fields are often built with native soil or low-quality fill dirt. These fields cannot be expected to perform like professional facilities, but meaningful improvements are still achievable.

Based just on the email, not a site visit, I felt they have three or four options, and all require some budget input. If they are going to work with what they have for infield soil, they can work on their grades so that they get better lateral surface flow across the infield and reduce puddling. Without a proper grade, the field will continue to be challenging to manage.

In some cases, removing the infield material and adding back turfgrass except for cutouts around the bases can reduce the liability of dealing with a clay infield. Field conditioners, added incrementally, can manage moisture on a short-term basis. A more aggressive approach would be removing some of the infield soil and replacing it with a better one.

Ultimately, improving a clay-dominant infield requires balancing cost, labor and expectations. Communities can make meaningful improvements through better grading and moisture management with amendments, while more significant renovations — if feasible — offer longer-term stability. Even small steps taken intentionally can dramatically improve playability and safety for youth athletes. **SFM**



Grady Miller, Ph.D.

Professor and Extension Turf Specialist
North Carolina State University

Questions?

Send them to Grady Miller at North Carolina State University, Box 7620, Raleigh, NC 27695 or e-mail grady_miller@ncsu.edu

Or, send your question to Pamela Sherratt at 202 Kottman Hall, 2001 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210 or sherratt.1@osu.edu

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