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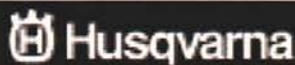
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Future Sports Fields

by Jim Puhalla



The sports field management industry is reaching an adolescent stage of development. It's not fully mature, but it's beginning to apply some scientific management principles characteristic of a mature industry. The following lists some observations and predictions about the future direction of sports turf management.

Demographic and social trends

- The population of North America is steadily aging, and mature Americans are more active than ever before. Fields managers should expect increased demand for fields used by mature citizens for recreational sports such as softball.

- Perhaps the most important single development in sports over the last 25 years has been the rapid growth of participation by girls and women. The trend has contributed to overcrowding on existing fields, and has spurred much new construction to compensate.

- In many urban and suburban areas, land values have skyrocketed. Schools and parks must constantly find new ways to get more use out of their existing space.

- For years, city parks and sports facilities have been left to deteriorate, regarded as costly amenities. Today, studies are showing that athletic competition reduces crime in urban neighborhoods. This should lead to construction and improved maintenance of sports fields in cities and towns throughout North America.

- Organizing and sanctioning bodies have become more conscious than ever of potential liability for player injuries. Managers once saw uneven turf in terms of bad bounces, but now see it in terms of lawsuits waiting to happen. Fields of the future should be much safer.

- Growing sports, like lacrosse and soccer, are having an obvious effect on the work of sports fields managers. Soccer fields make up a substantial portion of the new fields under construction in North America today. The manager of the future may be required to build and maintain facilities for sports that scarcely exist today.

Scientific and technical trends

- Researchers continue to develop seed cultivars that require less maintenance, thrive in a wider variety of climatic conditions, and fight off

as a growing culture, they will deal more effectively with the stresses that weaken turfgrass and promote pest problems.

- In recent years, many high-profile facilities have turned to amended sand fields, especially in professional and collegiate programs. Continuing advancement is extending the technique's application, and allowing its consideration on lower-budget fields.

- Many managers in the transitional zone have had difficulty maintaining a healthy and vigorous turfgrass culture. Climatic conditions are not ideal for either southern or northern cultivars. New varieties will deal more successfully with specialized conditions in this region.

- European fields managers have spent decades developing management techniques for soccer fields. As the sport's popularity grows in North America, many managers will study European practices.

- For more than a century, the government has supported research in the golf industry, but support of other types of sports turf has not been forthcoming. Universities and private industry have begun to pick up the slack in recent years, and this trend should continue.

- Most equipment currently used by North American fields managers was originally designed to maintain lawns around schools, colleges and universities, large industrial facilities, etc. For the first time, equipment designed specifically to meet sports field managers' needs is hitting the market.

The same trend is occurring in materials. New processed clay products for pitcher's mounds and batter's boxes are now on the market. Also, diatomaceous earth turf and skinned-area conditioners offer an alternative to clay and organic materials that have been staples in



Soccer will continue to grow, and will greatly impact the evolving role of sports turf managers.

pests better. Any manager planting turfgrass today should ask about new developments before choosing a variety. This trend will only accelerate in the future.

- Integrated Pest Management (IPM) was a great step forward in the responsible use of chemicals. But the new generation of sports turf managers will shift the focus from pest management to general maintenance of turf health and durability. A more useful conceptual framework for the future would be Integrated Cultural Management (ICM). As fields managers come to understand turfgrass

the industry. Manufacturers will continue to develop these new products in the future.

Trends in management practices

- Synthetic surfaces have drawn increasing criticism from players and coaches. A recent survey of NFL players listed the ten best and five worst playing surfaces in the NFL. All of the ten best were natural turf; all of the five worst were synthetic.¹

As synthetic surfaces come up for regular replacement, school districts will continue to move back to natural turf.

- In the past decade, more and more professional stadiums have been committed to a single sport. Cities with multi-use professional facilities are constructing separate stadiums devoted to the unique needs of each sport. This trend is the subject of intense public debate and financing efforts in many cities.

Soccer and football programs have long been forced to coexist in many high school districts. But more and more schools are constructing separate fields to support competition in their fast-growing soccer programs.

- Taxpayer activism and government downsizing have forced facility managers in many school districts and parks and recreation departments to deal with smaller budgets. Many fields managers are forming innovative partnerships with local boosters and other community groups to help raise funds for construction and renovation projects.

- The new generation of fields managers recognizes that wise decisions require consideration of long-term costs. They will move away from construction shortcuts and cutbacks in materials and services expenditures which cost facilities more money in the long run.

- Academic programs in North American universities are beginning to offer students formal scientific and

management training. This trend will continue to promote a new generation of sports field managers who successfully practice Integrated Cultural Management to provide athletes safe, attractive fields.

Predicting the future is a chancy proposition — one that makes me as nervous as anyone. But tomorrow's developments grow out of today's trends. A wise manager makes plans for the future based on a hard look at what's happening each day. □

Jim Puhalla is president of Sportscape International, Inc., of Boardman, OH, and Dallas, TX. He is author, with Mississippi State University Professors Jeff Krans and Mike Goatley, of a forthcoming book: Sports Fields — a Manual for Design, Construction and Maintenance. Material in this article was adapted from that book.

¹ Dallas Morning News, August 3, 1997.

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Grant Trenbeath, head groundskeeper for the Arizona Diamondbacks. To the right, Trenbeath mows the outfield with the John Deere 2653A Utility Mower.

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"This ballpark is unique to anything that's been done before," says Grant Trenbeath, head groundskeeper for the Arizona Diamondbacks Baseball Club, major league baseball's newest team. Like the Diamondbacks, Trenbeath was in his inaugural season as a major league groundskeeper during 1998. And it was a learning experience, to say the least.

"It's a world inside itself," observes Trenbeath about the Bank One Ballpark. "The roof, the air conditioning, the shade line, not to mention the heat factor. Also the newness of the park. There's a maturity process that goes on and it takes a certain amount of time to establish that."

To help bring a rookie field up to major league standards, Trenbeath relied on a proven veteran. "I've worked with John Deere equipment in the past, so when I was approached about using John Deere, it had my full support."

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something, it's much higher quality. Prime example is the Aercore 800. I've messed around with other aerators and that's the Cadillac."

But according to Trenbeath, it takes

more than equipment to make a winner. "Most groundkeepers will tell you the equipment is only as good as the service. And John Deere to me is the best service-wise. And that's peace of mind."

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A Seminar and a Challenge



The Northern California Chapter of STMA held its Fall Seminar at San Jose State University November 18.

STMA President Steve Guise attended the meeting as the National representative. He welcomed attendees and briefly addressed the services provided by National.

Rich Genoff, field manager for the San Francisco 49ers, addressed challenges faced by his crew at the 49ers' training facility in Santa Clara, CA. Rich has a hands-on management style, which keeps him in touch with every aspect of the program. He walked attendees through the process of conversion from an artificial turf field to natural turfgrass.

Rich's presentation emphasized proper disposal of the old surface and underlying materials. He noted methods used by the local independent contractor to recycle as much of the material as possible. These include breaking down and recycling the concrete, which help the environment while benefiting the contractor financially.

The afternoon session began with a lawn mower competition. Participants maneuvered the machines through a series of pylons. Speed was the object, but proper operating techniques and safety proved crucial in the end.

As Steve Guise reported, it was obvious who really knew how to operate the mowers.

Winners of the competition were:

First Place

Raul Bueno
Lead Groundskeeper
Spartan Stadium
San Jose State University

Second Place

Cutberto Santana
Grounds Division Sports Crew
UC Davis

Third Place

Helder Vieira
Cambrian School District
San Jose, CA

Brief field tours of San Jose State University and an Equipment Show brought the seminar to a close.

The Northern California Chapter challenges any chapter to a mower competition at next year's STMA

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Conference Jan. 12-16, 2000, in St. Louis, MO.

Chapter news

Mid-South Chapter: The Mid-South Chapter will hold a field day in January. The date and location will be announced soon.

For information, contact Jim Calhoun: (901) 755-1305, or Robert Bodi: (901) 383-2414.

Iowa Chapter: ISTMA will again participate in the Iowa Turfgrass Conference Jan. 25-27, at the Des Moines Convention Center. A special sports turf track of educational sessions will be held 8:30 am-4:00 pm, Jan. 25; 1:30-3:00 pm, Jan. 26; and 8:00-11:45 am, Jan. 27.

ISTMA will hold its annual meeting 3:00-4:00 pm, Jan. 26. The general session will feature Keynote Speaker Gerry Sweda of Sweda



A lawn mower competition highlighted Nor-Cal's Fall Seminar. *Courtesy: STMA*

Training, 10:15-11:30 am, Jan. 26. He'll address the topic: "How could a job that felt so good in the past, feel so bad today." A two-hour Continuing Pesticide Instructional Course begins at 1:30 pm, Jan. 27.

this event, contact Jeff Fowler: (814) 437-7607.

For general information, contact Dan Douglas, Reading Phillies Baseball Club: (610) 375-8469, ext. 212.

For information, contact Lori Westrum at the Turf Office: (515) 232-8222, or fax (515) 232-8228.

KAFMO Chapter: Feb. 19, KAFMO/STMA will sponsor an athletic field conference in Grantville, PA. The event will feature seminars and vendor displays. Presentation topics include: drainage, liability, sprayer calibration, low-budget turf care, innovative establishment systems, and more.

Mar. 23, KAFMO/STMA is co-sponsoring the Northwestern Pennsylvania Athletic Field Turf and Ornamental Conference in Meadville, PA. For details on

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Minnesota Chapter: The Minnesota Sports Turf Managers Association is planning a March workshop at the newly expanded Toro headquarters in Bloomington, MN.

For information, contact Connie Rudolph: (612) 646-1679.

Midwest Chapter: The Midwest Chapter held its annual meeting Dec. 2 at Pheasant Run Resort & Expo Center in St. Charles, IL. The meeting was held in conjunction with the sports turf track of the North Central Turfgrass Exposition. Officers re-elected for 1999 are:

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Village of Lincolnshire

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Hinsdale Central High School

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Tom Breier
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For information, contact the chapter hotline: (847) 622-3517.

Colorado Chapter: For information, call the 24-hour CSTMA chapter hotline: (303) 438-9645.

Florida Chapter #1: For information, contact John Mascaro: (954) 341-3115.

Great Lakes Chapter: For information, contact Joe Zelinko: (800) 897-9714, or Boyd Montgomery: (419) 885-1982.

Michigan Chapter: For information, contact Rick Jurries, West Ottawa Public Schools: (616) 395-2364.

MAFMO Chapter: For information, contact the hotline: (410) 290-5652.

Northern California Chapter: For information, contact Sal Genito, UC Davis: (530) 752-1691.

Southern California Chapter: For information, contact the chapter hotline: (888) 578-STMA.

Chapters on the grow

North Texas Chapter: For information, contact Rene Asprion,

Diamond Pro: (800) 228-2987, or Tom Welch, CSM, Central Garden and Pet: (800) 788-9581.

Arizona Chapter: For information, contact Bill Murphy, City of Scottsdale Parks & Recreation Department: (602) 994-7954, or Kris Kircher, City of Chandler Parks & Recreation Department: (602) 786-2728.

Indiana Chapter: For information, contact Terry Updike, B & B Fertilizer: (219) 356-8424, or Pat Hickner: (800) 672-4273.

Wisconsin Chapter: For information, contact Rich Riggs, R. H. Rettler & Associates, Inc.: (715) 341-2633.

Nevada Chapter: For information, contact Ibsen Dow: (702) 649-1551, or Alan Paulson, Clark County School District: (702) 799-8724.

Great Plains Chapter: For information, contact Mark Schimming, City of Wichita: (316) 337-9123. □

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The Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) is an organization of professionals representing all segments of the sports turf industry. Our members work to combine the science of growing grass and the art of maintaining sports turf to produce playing fields that are both safe and aesthetically pleasing.

STMA provides members with a variety of benefits, including: education through regional institutes and conferences; support for sports turf research; facilities tours; a national awards program; access to the STMA National Conference and Exhibition; complimentary subscriptions to Sports Turf Manager and sportsTURF Magazine; and much more.

If you're serious about the sports turf industry, then it's time to become a member of STMA. Join today!

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