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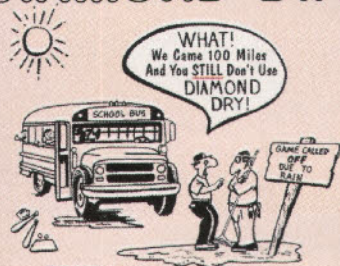
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FIELD SCIENCE

continued from page 10

aesthetic appearance of dormant bermudagrass. The additional wear tolerance that a perennial ryegrass overseeding provides is minimal at best and can often decrease the health of the bermudagrass during spring green-up. Let's face facts, the primary reason for overseeding is aesthetics, period.

So here is what you do. First, plan your spring transition somewhere between May 1 and June 15 (more southern areas such as Florida and Texas can go earlier). Any earlier than May 1 and the bermudagrass can stagnate and not fill in fast enough. Any later than June 15 and you are encroaching too far into the optimum bermudagrass-growing season.

Next, determine why you need the overseeding in the spring. Do you have a late spring/early summer tournament, spring baseball/softball season, or spring training for football? After your main event is completed, chemically remove your overseeded grass and get the bermudagrass going. And as much as I hate to say it, you have to teach management about the problems of transition. It is just part of overseeding and the fields may not look their best for a couple of weeks.

Third, face facts: If you've got the money to buy the seed, you've got the money to chemically remove it. So take control of the situation, remove the ryegrass on your time

schedule, and optimize the growing potential of your bermudagrass.

Figure 3 provides a flow chart of some basic questions you can answer to determine what is the best method, natural or chemical transition, is the best for you. Because in the end, you have to do what is best for your facility taking into account, environmental, usability, aesthetic, time, and budgetary constraints.

It is my opinion that some of us should take a step back and consider why we are overseeding in the first place. If you are thinking that you don't have the budget to chemically remove the ryegrass, then you don't have the budget to overseed, plain and simple. For most, chemical removal is part of overseeding. It is not an option.

Finally, some of us need to remember that we are in the business of growing bermudagrass. If you lose your bermudagrass base you will have nothing to hold you overseeding. And a young seedling stand of ryegrass unprotected by the stolons of bermudagrass does not last long at all. In all cases, do whatever is necessary to maximize the growth of the bermudagrass. ■

J. Scott McElroy, Ph.D., is a Turfgrass Weed Scientist at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. See <http://turfweeds.utk.edu>.



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ASA boasts showcase field

The Amateur Softball Association's Don E. Porter Hall of Fame Stadium, a four-field facility in Oklahoma City, won the 2005 Sports Turf Managers Association's College Softball Field of the Year Award. Sports turf superintendent Rick Neville accepted the award at last month's STMA Conference.

The main field and Field #2 were built in 1987 and two more fields were added 3 years ago. That project included construction of the Hall of Fame Plaza and Sports Festival Esplanade, a 300-foot long, 40-foot wide walkway that features vendor tents and fan activities during the Big XII Conference Championship and NCAA Women's College World Series. ASA has hosted the latter event 13 times and will again in 2006. The main field also sees action in two NAIA invitational tournaments, a national junior college regional, as well as host home games for Oklahoma City University.

Also, last July the stadium was home of the inaugural World Cup of Softball, an international event that featured five of the world's best national teams. Nearly 200 games were played on Field 1 alone last year.

After Neville took over last January, a soil analysis showed that the main field's skin consisted of 60% sand, 10% silt, and 30% clay mix. Vitrified clay is added as needed to the infield skin to provide for a safe buffer layer on top of the infield mix. (Calcined clay is added to the pitcher's circle and then lightly watered before games.) Neville overseeded with a perennial ryegrass mix (Playmate) in February, which previously had not been done, resulting in his having to battle poa annua.

All fields feature automated irrigation systems and lighting by Musco. The systems have seven zones and 30 heads in the outfield alone; irrigation was added to the wing areas last July before a resodding.



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FIELD OF THE YEAR



Quick connect valves also were added in foul territories behind first and third bases for infield skin watering (rather than on the warning track). Newville reports he'll be replacing the warning track this winter from a fine chat gravel to a less abrasive material (from Stabilizer Solutions).

World Series work

The women's College World Series presents challenges, Newville says. The first is fully prepping the field in a 10-minute window. "We rake out the chalked lines, drag the field, rebuild the pitcher's circle and home plate areas, double-mark all chalk lines, and water the skin," he says.

The second challenge comes after ESPN and everyone else that shows up for the WS has left, and that's resurrecting the turf. Beyond the temporary fence set up for fast-pitch games are the camera lifts, temporary bleachers, temporary restrooms, and VIP loungers, which are really just tractor-trailer rigs. All these items are on the turf for one week, Newville says.

For 2006

"We will be a bit less aggressive with top-dressing on two of the fields as they are currently to our desired level of playability," Newville says. "We will topdress in conjunction with core aeration to amend the soil. We will be more aggressive with verticutting as we observed a significant improvement in the Bermuda growth rate after verticutting applications.

"We will also incorporate more controlled released fertilizers as our schedule this year will not allow as much time between events for some cultural practices."

He adds, "We will be acquiring a Jacobsen bed-mount topdresser and a Jacobsen TracAire aerator from Luber Brothers of Oklahoma City."



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What are his keys to keeping the infield skin safe and playable through all the games and activities on his fields?

"There are many aspects to maintaining a safe and playable infield. We try to keep our skins as firm as possible with a 1/4-inch of vitrified clay amendment on top. The amendment we used last year had a lot of fines in it, which was good as it helped amend our loose soils," says Newville. "This year we will incorporate a Stabilizer Solution product into our infield skins, and use a vitrified amendment with uniform particle sizing.

"Moisture is the single most important factor in maintaining a safe skin. We have installed the Rain Bird E-115 rotary heads (with turf covers) behind the pitching circles so that we can be efficient in maintaining moisture levels in the skin during our tournaments when field prep time is at a minimum. These heads will be removed for all televised events," Newville says.

"I think the greatest pleasure, as with most jobs, is seeing the results of one's hard work and effort," says Newville. "The positive feedback from coaches, players, and the NCAA is also quite a motivator to continue my education and provide the best surfaces we can.

What about the flip side? "Our inflated schedule is allowing less time between events for some cultural practices to be as consistent as I would like, but we just have to evolve with the schedule and make alterations in our maintenance programs," says Newville.

Equipment

The stadium field, along with Fields 3 and 4, are mowed with a Jacobsen 1880 fairway mower with groomers. Field 2 is mowed with a Ransomes t-plex 185d. Core aeration is done with a Ryan Greensaire 24 walk-behind. Verticutting is done via a Jake hydraulic 214 machine, provided by Luber Brothers of Oklahoma City. Use of a topdresser is obtained by trading out equipment with a local minor league organization.

The STMA Field of the Year Awards Program has been made possible through the generous support of its sponsors. They include Bayer; Carolina Green; Covermaster; Hunter Industries; Jacobsen, A Textron Co.; Nu-Gro; Turface Athletics/Profile Products; Turf Seed; West Coast Turf; and World Class Athletic Surfaces. ■

Maintenance Plan

January-February: Reconstruction and renovation of skin areas. Reset plates, pitching rubbers, and bases. Overseed with perennial rye blend at 10-lb/1000 sq. ft. rate.

March: Fertilize with 17-5-9 10% S at a rate of 1/2-lb N/1000 sq. ft. every 2 weeks. Mow as needed. Height of cut is 7/8 inches.

April-May: Core aerate with 1/2-inch diameter tines. Topdress at a 1/4-inch rate with washed sand. Make post-emergent herbicide as needed following standard IPM practices. Lightly verticut once each month. Fertilize with 17-5-9 10% S at a rate of 1/2 lb N/1000 sq. ft. Every 2 weeks. Wash lips every 2 weeks. Mow daily at a height of 3/4 inches.

June: Core aerate. Topdress at a 1/4-inch rate with washed sand. Lightly verticut. Fertilize with 21-7-14 at a rate of 1/2 lb N/1000 sq. ft. every 2 weeks. Mow daily at 3/4 inches. Wash lips every 2 weeks.

July: Core aerate wings. Lower height of cut to 5/8 inches. Mow daily. Fertilize with 21-7-14 N at 1/2 lb/1000 sq. ft. Fertilize with 0-0-61 at a 1 lb rate of K. Lightly verticut. Topdress at a 1/4 inch rate. Wash lips every 2 weeks.

August: Core aerate wings. Fertilize twice with 17-5-0 10% S at a rate of 1/2 lb N/1000 sq. ft. Mow daily with height of cut raised to 3/4 inch. Wash lips every 2 weeks.

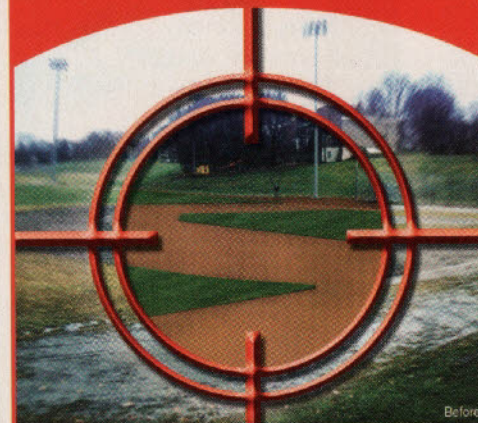
September: Core aerate wings. Fertilize twice with 17-5-9 10% S at a rate of 1/2 lb. N/1000 sq. ft. Mow daily. Wash lips every 2 weeks. Raise HOC to 7/8 inch.

October: Core aerate wings. Fertilize with 18-24-12 at a rate of 1 lb phosphorus/1000 sq. ft. Overseed with perennial ryegrass at a rate of 8 lb/1000 sq. ft. Topdress at a 1/4-inch rate. Mow as needed.

November-December: Mow as needed. Take on any reconstruction/renovation projects.



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Tips on happy hiring

By Dan Brockett

Last fall a friend asked if I had a sample employment policy concerning drugs and alcohol that I could share with him, specifically one that would prohibit his new employee from showing up to work drunk or high.

“Gosh I don’t think I do, but why do you think you need one. Isn’t it just expected that employees don’t come to work under the influence?” I asked him.

“It’s like wearing pants. My boss didn’t tell me I had to, I just assumed I should.”

“Well” he replied, “there was an incident and I heard before I hired him he’s had some problems in the past.”

I thought but didn’t say “And you hired him anyway?” After all, my friend is a bright, successful business owner.

When the whole story came out it had a familiar ring. A small employer who is busy loses an employee and needs to find a replacement yesterday. The employer wants someone with previous experience in his field because he doesn’t have time to train.

The phrase I most often hear is “I need someone to hit the ground running.” This phrase often puts me in mind of my hyperactive 4-year-old who sometimes literally hits the ground running when I put him down. If we added up all of the time we saved not training employees who were to hit the ground running, and subtracted all of the time we spent fixing problems, would we most often save time or lose time?

Back to my friend’s hiring story: He asked around for a few days and finally heard of someone who apparently no one else wanted. My friend hired him on the spot and the guy showed up drunk (at 6 AM!) his third day on the job. My friend assures me that the other 2 days the guy was just fine.

First, let me assure you that an employment policy prohibiting this type of thing is not going to fix the problem. Second, when an employer uses this kind of hiring process, they are spinning the chuck-a-luck wheel and the odds of winning are decidedly not in his or her favor.

Bad hiring decisions cost time, money, and stress. In many cases you are hiring someone to come live with you and your colleagues



JOHN MOHR PHOTOGRAPHY

for 40 or more hours a week. Do you want to live and work with someone who doesn’t perform or is painful to be around?

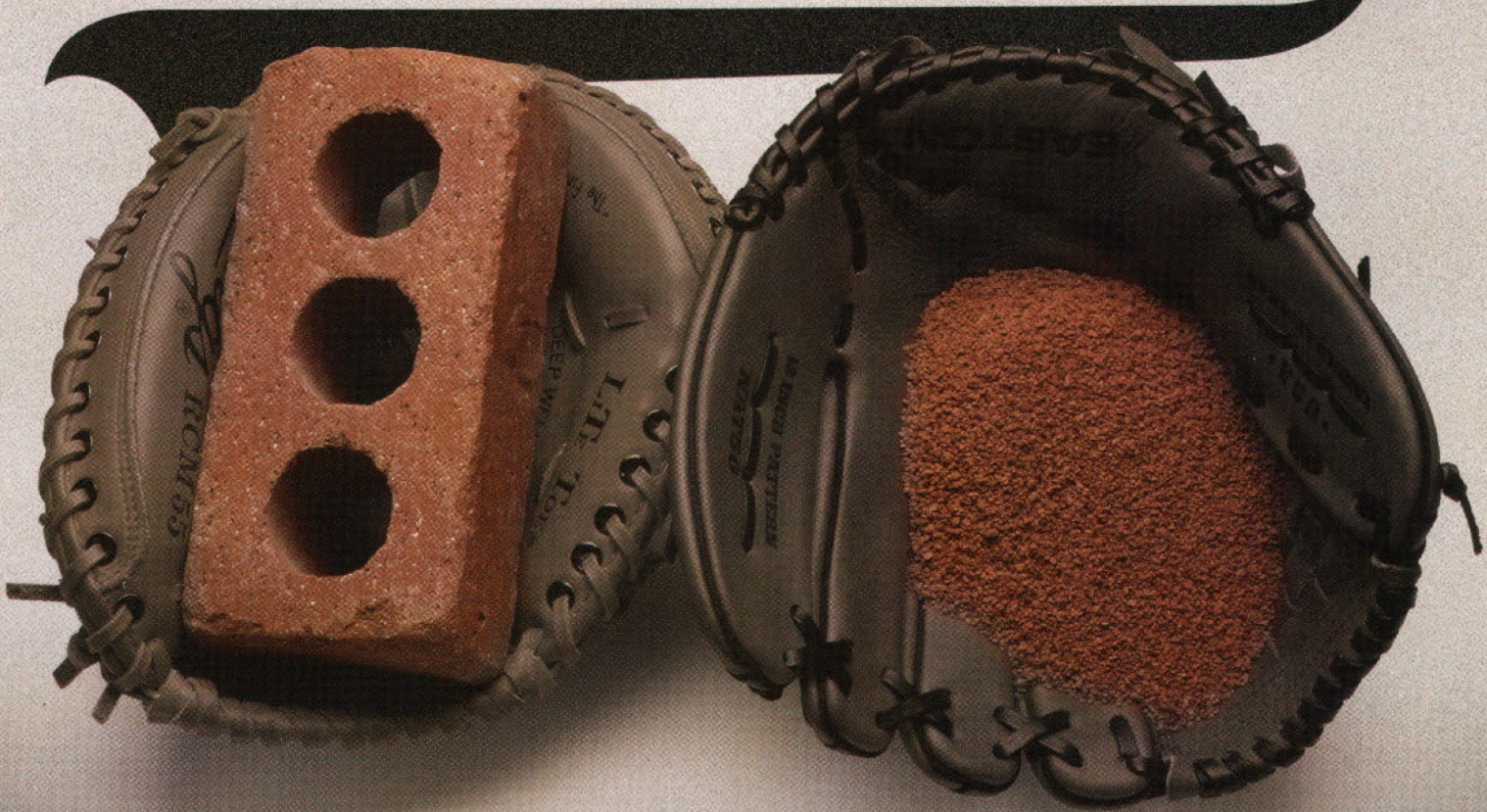
Small employers are at a disadvantage when it comes to hiring because, generally, small employers wear many hats and that often leads to a lack of time, expertise, and effort in the hiring process. I would encourage you to spend some time and effort in improving this process; bad decisions and bad results happen when you are in panic mode. Start planning now for your next hire.

Who are you looking for?

Before you start looking for employees, decide who it is you are looking for:

- Hard skills specific to your trade
- Soft skills such as communicating or problem-solving
- Attitude, i.e., get along with others, avoid making excuses, react well to criticism.

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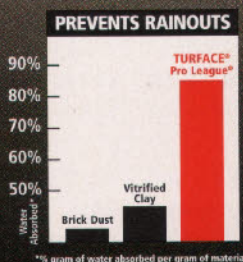
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- Aptitude, i.e., ability to learn, follow directions, understand. (Aptitude can vary a lot from job to job, e.g., someone with a high aptitude toward mechanics may have a low aptitude in communicating.)

- Work ethic, i.e., ability to get to work, being self-motivated and stable, etc. Stable. (Some might combine this with attitude, but I have met some folks with cheery dispositions who couldn't seem to get work done.)

This list is like a restaurant buffet; choose which ones you like the most (and are most important to you) and leave the rest behind. You cannot eat everything on the buffet.

You may consider several options (and combinations) for recruitment based on who you are looking for. For example, if you need technical or professional skills, you may consider recruiting through technical trainers, trade publications, professional associations, or headhunters. If you are looking for general labor you may place a help wanted ad, help wanted posters, try temp agencies, or use the Career Link.

Another idea to consider is personal recruiting: locating the right talent and selling the job to someone whom has proven themselves capable with other employers. I once recruited an employee at a convenience store who impressed me with his quick, capable actions in a vast sea of slow-moving sloths (his co-workers). I thought if he could succeed in that atmosphere he could thrive elsewhere.

Interviews/selection

Your screening of applications, interview questions, and selection process need to be based on the criteria you develop from the "Who are you looking for?" list above. In order to develop these criteria, look at the list and decide what are your top needs. A lot of employers will jump right to the hard skills section. I would advise you not to do that unless these skills are very particular to your work, very hard to find, or take a long time to develop.

For most general labor jobs, I will take a good attitude over good hard skills. It is far easier to train someone to do a task than it is to change someone's attitude. I have occasionally hit the jackpot when I have found someone with a good attitude, aptitude and work ethic that is missing hard skills. Many employers have overlooked them and they are easy to train and become a valuable employee.

There are very good people out there who are great for one job and terrible for another. A good interview question to sort out personality

types deals with work styles: Do you prefer working on a lot of things at the same time (multi-tasking) or working on something until you are done with it? You don't want to phrase these questions to tip an advantage to either answer. You need honesty, not the "correct" answer to your question. Many job applicants will tell you they are willing to do anything or that any opportunity would make them happy. Don't believe it. It generally won't last a week.

Once you have selected which qualities are most important to you, develop methods to screen people in or out. For example, if I am looking for someone who is stable, reliable, etc., I will look for people who seem to be able to hold down a job for a while. I have looked at many applications that list 10 or more jobs over a 2-year period; I'm generally not interested.

If attitude and ability to get along are important, look for clues from "Reason for leaving employment" and from interview questions like "Tell me about someone from your last job that was hard to get along with." You can even get at this by asking the opposite question "Tell me about your favorite boss/co-worker/teacher?" The real bad attitudes will jump right out at these types of questions by telling you how unfair everyone has been to him throughout his lifetime.

The best interviewers do a lot of listening and even leave plenty of blank spaces and pregnant pauses so that candidates feel compelled to carry on. This may feel uncomfortable at first, but you

Many job applicants will tell you they are willing to do anything or that any opportunity would make them happy. Don't believe it. It generally won't last a week.

won't believe what will come out of some mouths when you get candidates talking freely and openly. One candidate told me he didn't really want to go back to work but his unemployment was running out!

Another told me he would be miserable at the job he was vying for but he needed something to tide him over. Others have confessed not being able to get to work on time regularly, not showing up for work (almost always someone else's fault), and various past misbehaviors. These responses have not come out due to brilliant questions, but from silence.

I often use written interview questions in combination with the verbal portion. I normally have them fill this out right before an interview. I use this because: a) it takes little of my time; b) a lot of people have someone else write their application or resume; and c) I get some extra insight into attitudes. These questions are short, simple, and open-ended and I don't generally make judgments based on spelling and grammar. (Examples: I like to ... Stress is ... When I have problems I . . .) You can tell based on these replies whether someone is self-motivated or needs to be given a lot of direction. Example: Do they run to the boss when they have a problem or try to figure it out themselves?