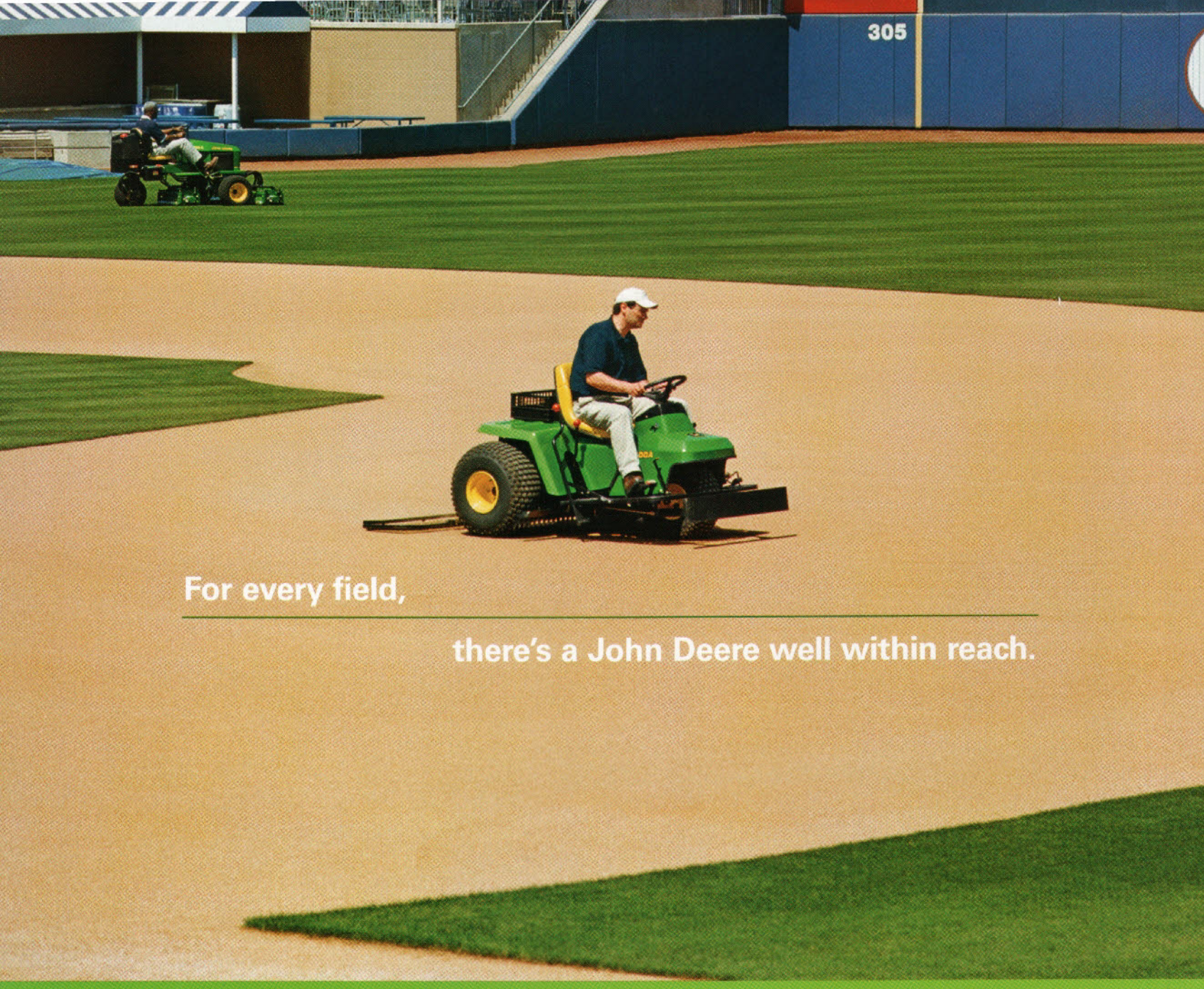

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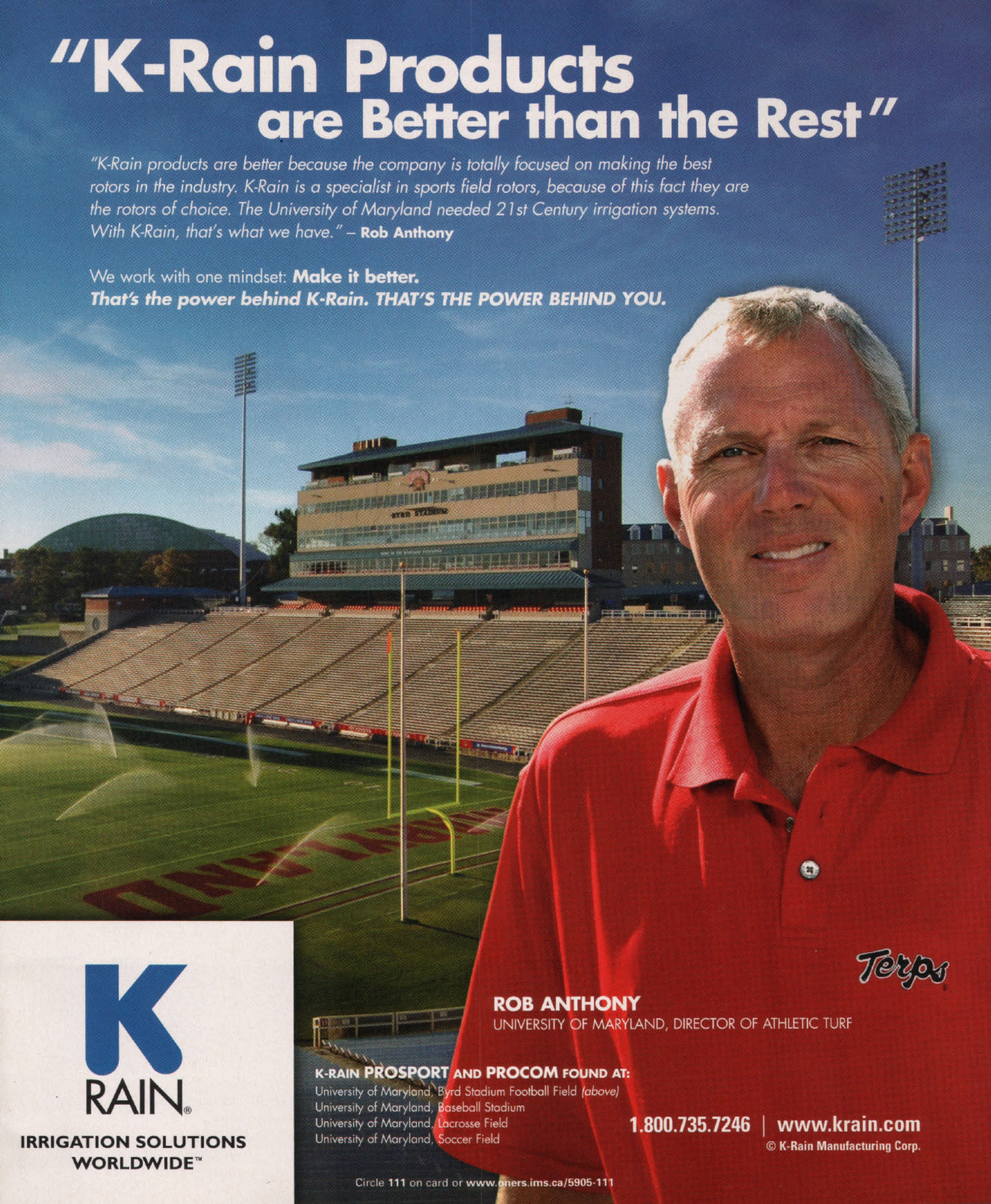

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March 2006

VOLUME 24 / NUMBER 03

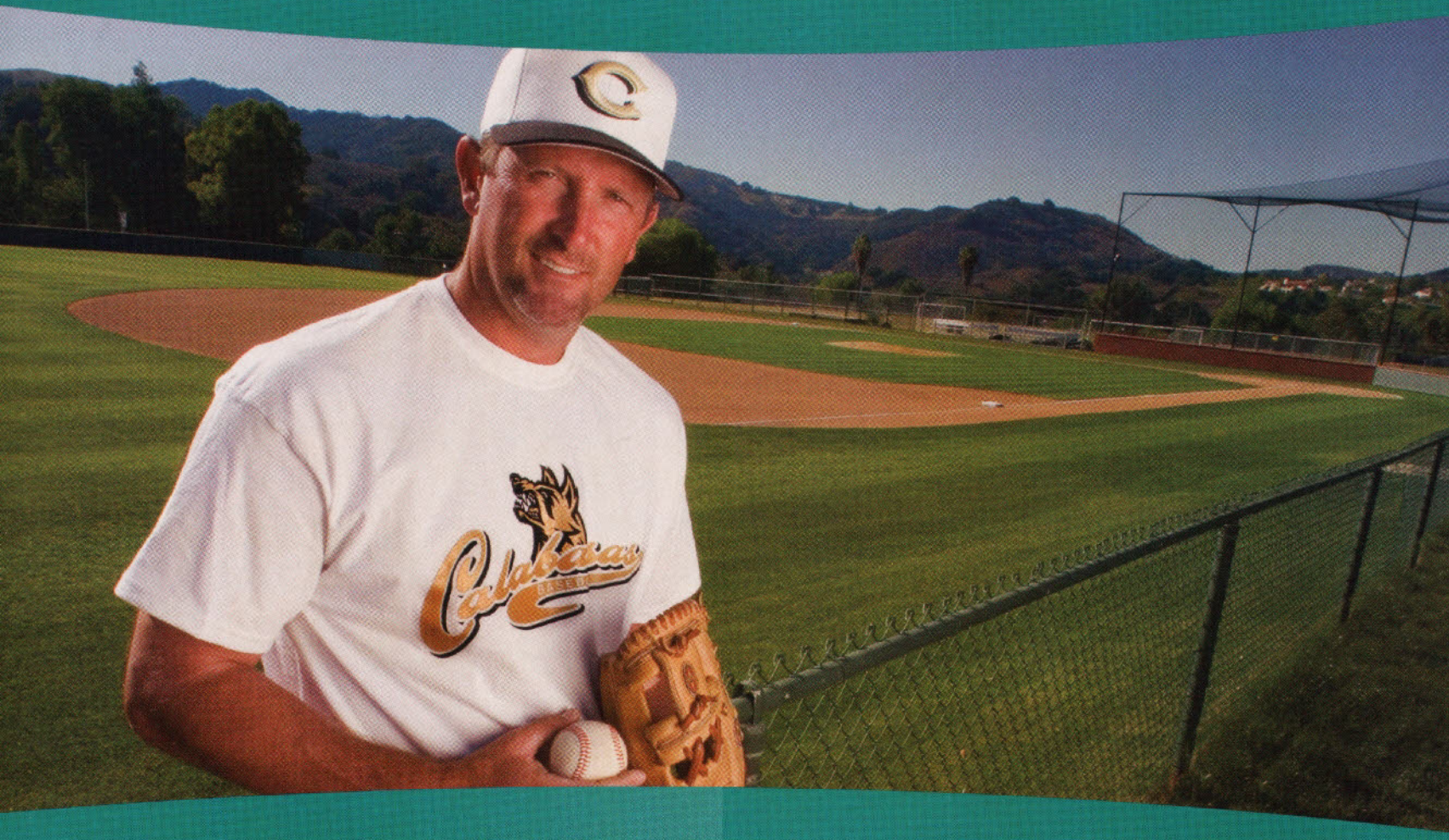
Photo credit Los Angeles Dodgers

FEATURES 53

DEPARTMENTS

On the cover: San Diego State's Charlie Smith Field at Tony Gwynn Stadium.

I designed this field from top to bottom,
and I wanted the best turf I could get.
The major leagues use Bull's-Eye Bermuda–
I wouldn't have used anything else.



–Bret Saberhagen
Head Baseball Coach
Calabasas High School
Calabasas, CA
2x Cy Young Award Winner
1985 World Series MVP

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ERIC SCHRODER
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Hey, Joe Buck, why don't you find that silver spoon you were born with and stick it back in your mouth next time you want to make a comment like "It's dirt, really" when talking about growing grass in Chicago in January?

In case you missed it, Buck, a broadcaster for Fox, spouted that exact nonsense during the Carolina Panthers v. Bears playoff game telecast January 15. I'll take a bite out of my lawn if someone can prove to me that Buck has ever had a conversation with a sports turf manager about how difficult it is to prepare a natural turf field for an NFL game in the middle of winter.

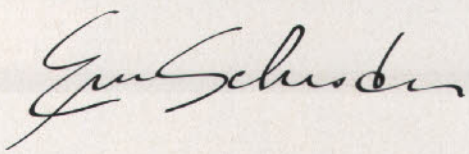
If it wasn't for Buck's father, the late Jack Buck, a true broadcasting legend, greasing the skids, I wonder where Sonny Boy would be today?

For the record, I thought Ken Mrock and his crew's field looked terrific for the conditions at that game, and was certainly NOT a factor in the game's outcome.

Twenty teams competed in STMA's 2nd annual Student Collegiate Challenge at the Annual Conference. Congrats to our "Q&A" columnist Dr. Grady Miller, whose students from the University of Florida made up two of the top four finishing teams. Joey Stevenson, Chase Best, Daniel Mudd, and Nick Gressley from Purdue University won the Challenge. And of course a team from my alma mater, Penn State, finished third. Congratulations to all.

The winner of the 2005 Terry Mellor Memorial Scholarship is Cheryl Burton, chief groundskeeper at Mt. Mary College in Milwaukee. The scholarship is awarded annually in memory of the brother of David Mellor, director of grounds with the Boston Red Sox, to honor individuals who commit to professional development through continuing education, and is sponsored by Turface Athletics. Burton has been with Mt. Mary College for 8 years and currently pursuing her associate's degree in horticulture landscaping.

William Ray, turf student at Abraham Baldwin Agriculture College in Tifton, GA, won the fourth annual Toro Super Bowl Sports Turf Training Program. Ray joined grounds crew to prepare and maintain the game field and practice facilities at Ford Field for Super Bowl XL last month. After serving in the U.S. Army, Ray focused on his education to prepare for a career in sports turf management.



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Certification Today

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STMA Headquarters reported last month that there are now 65 Certified Sports Field Managers. In 2005, nine new members were certified. In addition, at the Annual Conference members had two opportunities to test and seven out of eight people who took the exam passed.

Certification in the field of sports turf is important for the same reason it has been important in other fields. It raises the bar of excellence for everyone involved. Certification signifies that an individual has been found competent in the knowledge of sports field maintenance, and recertification monitors an individual's progress in acquiring continuing education. We demand standards of professionals from a number of other occupations. Why should we demand anything less of sports turf managers? In addition, certification is an increasingly important process for our association's growth and identity.

The Certification Committee under co-chairs Lance Tibbetts, CSFM and Dale Getz, CSFM, was successful in 2005, with a goal to grow the number of certified members. In the STMA Strategic Plan, a goal of 75 CSFMs by mid-2006 has been set. The committee also consistently monitors the program and recommends enhancements to ensure that the program is the top achievement for sports turf managers.

The mechanics of becoming certified are straightforward. The STMA firmly believes that a combination of education and experience are necessary to be the best possible athletic field manager. However, it also recognizes that in a profession as diverse as the sports turf industry, experience should play a major role. To successfully gain certification, sports turf managers must meet certain education and/or experience requirements. It is possible to be certified without having any formal education beyond high school if you have enough years of experience. You cannot, however, become certified by virtue of education alone. For more information on how to qualify for STMA'S Certification Program, contact Headquarters or visit the website at www.sportsturfmanager.org.

Priorities this year for the Certification Committee include reengineering the information process for those interested in pursuing certification, and developing a plan to promote to employers the importance of certification. It is these employers that can ultimately strongly influence the demand for certified members in their workplaces.

The decision to seek certification says more about an individual than a willingness to study for a test. It is symbolic of the commitment to the profession. It also speaks volumes about your desire for advancement, the hunger for new knowledge, and the pride in adding those letters to your title.

In the end, choosing to commit oneself to the certification process likely will not bring you fame or fortune. But if you believe in investing in your future, I cannot think of a richer professional experience.

Mike Trigg

Fight spring dead spot

By Gordon L. Kauffman, Ph.D.

I first encountered spring dead spot (SDS) in 2000 on a Tifway 419 bermudagrass fairway in Virginia Beach, VA while traveling with a USGA agronomist. I remember the agony on the superintendent's face as we discussed potential chemical control options and cultural practices to help reduce the damage from SDS the following spring. Finally the conversation turned to complete renovation and we contemplated a conversion to another species such as creeping bentgrass, or a more resistant cultivar of bermudagrass. At the time, options for this turf manager seemed bleak to say the least.

Researchers understood less back then about environmental and cultural practices impacting the life cycle of SDS, and there was no commercially acceptable chemical control. While a 30-40% reduction in disease severity was attainable, fungicide programs were costly because they typically required two or more applications. In addition, we understood less about the number, method, and timing of chemical applications necessary to provide an effective fungicide program for improved SDS control. Unfortunately, turf managers had very few options other than getting through the season with some turf recovery and hope for the best the following year.

Currently, more insight and information exists on how to fight SDS. Scientists now understand more about the life cycle of the causal pathogens, cultural and environmental factors that influence SDS development and breeding programs designed to select for more resistant bermudagrass cultivars. Also, chemical control options, including the timing and method of application of specific fungicides, are currently being assessed to develop more effective and improved fungicide programs to combat SDS. While my experiences with SDS have been primarily on golf courses, the disease can be problematic for sports turf managers. Athletic field managers often have, or are likely to deal with this disease if they are managing common bermudagrass (Cynodon dactylon) and Bermudagrass hybrids in the transition zone, and primarily in the northern most range of bermudagrass growth in the United States.

Symptoms and causal pathogen

SDS is a particularly devastating perennial disease to Bermudagrass because the pathogen begins its colonization by infecting turfgrass roots, stolons, and rhizomes. After visual diagnosis, control options are limited and likely too late. SDS infects bermudagrass of all ages,

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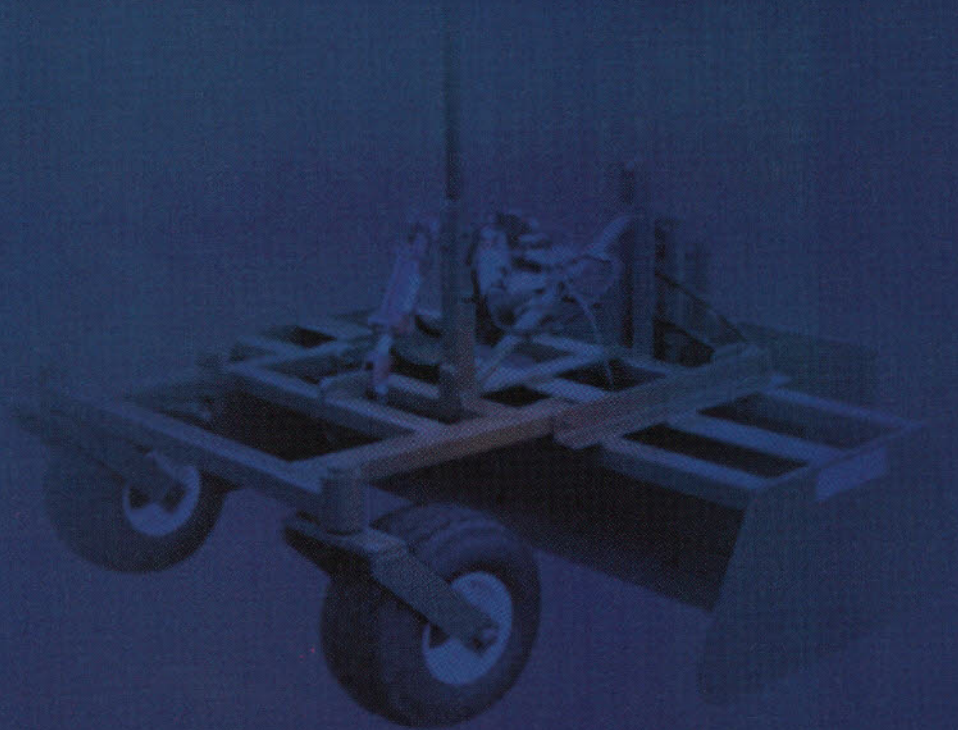

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One difficulty in interpreting SDS fungicide trial data is that test plots are often not uniformly infested, resulting in plot rather than treatment effects.

but most often occurs on established, 2-4 year old, intensely managed turfgrass stands. SDS kills Bermudagrass down to the soil surface while destroying roots, rhizomes, stolons, and shoots, leaving well defined, sunken, circular patches. Patches range in size from an inch up to a few feet in diameter and usually form as the bermudagrass breaks winter dormancy, although the infection likely occurs the previous fall. If left untreated, the patches begin to coalesce and devastate large turf areas.

The causal pathogens of SDS are three different root-infecting fungi called Ophiosphaerella herpotricha, O. korrae, and O. narmari. These pathogens are classified as ectotrophic root-infecting fungi (ERIF) based upon the site of primary infections. Species of these fungi are soil borne and grow over living turfgrass roots, rhizomes, and stolons similar to summer patch (Magnaporthe poae), which infects primarily bluegrasses, and take-all-patch (Gaeumannomyces graminis) of creeping bentgrass (Agrostis stoloniferous). Infected roots and stolons typically become rotted and covered with dark brown or black hyphae. O. korrae also causes necrotic ring spot disease of annual bluegrass (poa annua) and Kentucky bluegrass (poa pratensis).

Environmental, cultural factors

Several key environmental factors increase the chances of SDS infection and subsequent colonization. SDS is most active when temperatures and soil moisture favor fungal growth. Bermudagrass becomes most susceptible when growth slows in the early fall and spring during periods of cool, wet weather. Scientists believe, however, that much of the damage caused by SDS results from winter desiccation, making the initiation of fall dormancy, severity of the winter, and bermudagrass cold hardiness important factors for disease development. It appears that during the winter, SDS kills roots and crowns directly by infection, or indirectly by predisposing the Bermudagrass to winter injury and subsequent desiccation. bermudagrass cultivars with increased cold hardiness tend to exhibit greater resistance to SDS.

Cultural practices that promote increased winter hardiness can minimize SDS damage. For example, excessive fall nitrogen applications are not recommend in SDS prone areas. Avoid more than 4-5 lb. N/M/year, but most importantly, discontinue nitrogen applications at least six weeks before expected bermudagrass dormancy. Additional cultural practices used by turf managers to reduce the damage from SDS include routine core cultivation as an integral part of a thatch management program, improving soil drainage and compaction, maintaining adequate potassium fertility, and the use of acidifying fertilizers. Implementing these cultural solutions can be an effective first step when designing an SDS management program.

Chemical control

Control of SDS with fungicides has been spotty at best in the field and in control studies at turfgrass research plots throughout the United States. In order to suppress disease development, a systemic fungicide should be applied in the fall, when the pathogen begins to infect root tissue. The major factors influencing the control of SDS with fungicides include the timing and dilution rate of the application. When targeting a soil borne pathogen like SDS, chemical applications should be made in sufficient volumes of water so that the fungicide can effectively