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On the cover: STMA 2012 Professional Baseball Field of the Year Fluor Field at the West End, Greenville, SC, home of the Greenville Drive, is managed by Greg Burgess and assistant Ross Groenevelt. Fluor Field has hosted some of the nation's top college programs over the past 7 years, and the trend will continue in 2013 as 21 different programs are headed to downtown Greenville, including 2010 and 2011 National Champion University of South Carolina, Clemson, University of Cincinnati, Michigan State, Miami University (OH), USC-Upstate, University of Connecticut, and Northwestern. "Fluor Field has become a highly sought after venue for top NCAA baseball programs in recent years," says Drive General Manager Mike deMaine.

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From the Sidelines



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Early season use of sports fields

THIS MONTH I turn over this space to the gracious Mary Owen, extension turf specialist for the University of Massachusetts:

“Early season use of a field when grasses are not actively growing or when grasses are not growing quickly enough to recover from wear can cause lasting damage. Such damage may require costly renovations, result in down time later in the spring or summer, or require the use of herbicides to combat weeds that will invade areas where grass cover has been lost.

“Cool season grasses grow best when soil temperatures are in the 55 – 65 degree F range. Soil temperatures will vary, of course, by geography and topography and are also highly influenced by an urban “heat island” effect.

“While fields may be showing green and some growth, some fields in play are not replacing leaf and stem tissue at a rate that is rapid enough to maintain a dense playing surface. This replacement of tissue is critical for the turfgrass plant to recover, to grow new leaves and stems, and is crucial for recovery from traffic, maintenance of turf density and field safety. When the grass is not allowed the time to recover or when conditions are not good for recovery, the turf will thin, soil compaction will increase, weeds will invade and player safety will be compromised.

“Strategies for managing fields in early spring should include not only excellent agronomic practices aimed at maximizing shoot density and rooting, but also the scheduling of events (practice, game play or other use) for an appropriate amount of time directly related to the growing conditions and ability of a specific field to handle the play demanded.

“It is prudent to consider the playing conditions that will be expected as the season progresses. Heavy use of a dormant or slowly growing field can result in serious damage to the turf and to the soil. Rest and recovery time must be allowed for in the play/practice schedule, or the result will be an unsatisfactory field, a potentially unsafe field, and costly repairs and renovations later.”

Considerations for managing sports fields in the early spring:

- Restrict use on frozen or partially thawed turf.
- Avoid use of dormant (i.e. brown) turf or turf that is not actively growing.
- Reduce or restrict use on excessively wet or excessively dry fields.
- Minimize number of hours of use in relation to the growing condition of the turf.
- Keep practices, especially drills, off areas that are high traffic during games (i.e. mid-field, goal areas) and preferably off game fields entirely.
- Spread the wear out. Shift fields and move goal areas whenever possible. Rotate practice areas.
- Traffic on lighted fields, where there is the likelihood of additional hours of play and practice, should not be increased over what the field will bear simply because lighting is available.
- Require use of “gentler” footwear that is less likely to tear and divot. Suggest or require that sneakers be worn instead of cleats, as long as safe footing is not compromised.
- Overseed to “seedbank” desirable turfgrasses where traffic, wear and use are expected to be high.
- Aerate to reduce soil compaction and increase moisture release or infiltration, using solid tine or a slicer. Take care if there is a history or potential for annual grassy weed (e.g., crabgrass) infestation, so as not to aerate during peak germination times.
- Provide adequate fertility to ensure measured growth, avoiding excessive shoot growth.
- Irrigate, especially heavily used fields, if soil moisture is not adequate.

“Because there are no hard and fast rules about field use and because conditions may vary from field to field, from season to season and throughout the season, the experience of a knowledgeable sports turf manager who has a game plan for turf management and a policy for event scheduling is invaluable in determining when and for how long a field should be used.” ■

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President's Message

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Pay it forward

ONE OF OUR CONFERENCE KEYNOTE SPEAKERS, Ian Hill, gave a very thought provoking presentation in Daytona Beach this January. One of the quotes off Ian's website (www.thechangingpoint.com) does a pretty good job of summarizing how Ian goes about living his life: "Most of us don't have the capacity to change the whole big, bad world, but all of us have what it takes to handle our little corner of it."

Ian's no-nonsense speaking method caught many in the audience by surprise, but he quickly won our group over as it was evident that he was speaking from the heart. In doing his background research on STMA, Ian said it caused him to realize that he had never really considered how important sports turf managers had been to him as a standout high school athlete, a college track coach, and now a parent with a young daughter playing sports. In honor of the sports turf managers that had touched his life, Ian said he wanted to now "pay it forward" and donated \$1,000 to SAFE. He then challenged all of those in attendance that night to support SAFE by putting some cash into the hands of either Jeff Fowler or myself in honor of a mentor they wished to thank. For the remainder of the week, people from all areas of our industry approached me with cash and the name(s) of those they wished to recognize and thank.

I wish now that we had had the foresight to record the names of all those honored (Ian caught us off guard with his challenge), but I hope that each of you that made a donation takes the chance to share your appreciation in person, if at all possible. SAFE received an additional \$1,300 from Ian's challenge, and I am sure that they will gladly accept further donations if you are so inclined!

Paying it forward does not always involve cash. Another way is to volunteer for STMA committee service. The Board realizes that our committees are responsible for doing the "heavy lifting" of the association. As President, it is my charge to appoint Committee Chairs and then make the first attempt (eventually finalized through our Executive Committee) at placing volunteers per their preferred committee and the necessity to ensure that a committee is appropriately represented by all categories of STMA membership. We are engaging our Student Membership subcommittee (chaired by Amy Fouty, CSFM) in 2013, with goals of better serving our students and increasing and sustaining their membership.

We also have a new Sports Turf Curriculum task group committed to exploring how STMA can best deliver and administer the exciting new sports turf curriculum developed by our Education Manager, Kristen Althouse, as part of her Master's degree at The Pennsylvania State University. By way of Kristen's efforts, STMA has a comprehensive sports turf curriculum that is going to introduce a totally new audience to this profession, opening up possible career opportunities while also improving field safety and playability conditions.

Thanks to all who continue to pay it forward. ■

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Goatley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.



12 ways

a turf manager can help to elevate baseball team defense

IN PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL, the players are the product, without question. As turf managers, we provide the context for the game itself. Our daily goal is to enable the players to play the game to their maximum potential. The modern groundskeeper at the professional level generally does not doctor the field drastically for the home team daily, as may have been done in decades past. However, he can make subtle adjustments to the field that over time should advance the progress of the team. Much of what I will discuss does not necessarily lead to favoring one team over another. The key is to focus on providing the best possible environment for players to perform.

Players play, it's their game. All we can do is promote quality play by providing a consistent surface. Think of your field and how it appears as the managers exchange lineup cards with the umpires at home plate. Essentially, you have given the players a blank canvas. One of the beautiful moments in baseball is the top of the first inning. Not knowing what the next nine innings will offer is part of the daily excitement that motivates me to work on the field year after year. It could be a good day for the hitters, maybe some spectacular defense, or perhaps a no-hitter. These are the

things a fan comes to see. Our job is to provide a field that facilitates both routine and outstanding play.

Think about that blank canvas for a minute. Ask yourself what you can do as a professional turf manager to provide a consistent surface for 70 or more home games per year. Turf cut at the same height daily, crisp and smooth edges, even and predictable hops throughout the infield skin area. There are different ways to achieve things with infield maintenance, so I tend to focus on two words as we work: **emphasize results**. The results of your work are

what players see every day. Most of them have no concept of what your processes and routines are each day, and most do not care either. It is all about results with footing, ball roll and ball bounce. Here are 12 ways you can help to elevate your team's defense.

1. THE CATCHER'S AREA

Providing your catcher with footing that is firm, moist and comfortable will help him handle the pitches and throw competitively. It is critical to keep this area level with home plate so your catcher is able to transfer his weight effectively and stay on top of his throws to the bases. Another consideration is the dirt behind home plate, directly in front of the catcher. These areas have a tendency to get hard and baked, as they are not worked up by spikes. The key point here is that most of the short hops on pitches in front of the catcher land in this area. Proper appli-

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cation of moisture to this area and daily work with a hard, steel rake is essential. Use a controlled, fine-mist nozzle here; to test this spot, bounce a baseball to check the compaction. Grooming this area will allow the catcher to cleanly block balls with his body.

2. DIRT IN FRONT OF HOME PLATE

Visualize a pitcher making a quality pitch, getting the hitter to hit the ball at a downward angle, with the ball striking dirt out in front of home plate first. As long as I watch baseball, my view will be that this circumstance should produce an out. By keeping this area moist and a bit softer than the infield dirt, you can slow down the speed of the ball. This helps infielders be a little quicker with their first step. It also gives the pitcher a chance on comebackers. Balls that hit hard, compacted dirt on their way up the middle tend to not only get by the pitcher but by middle infielders as well.

Keep in mind how little reaction time your 3rd baseman has, especially on balls hit down the line. Slowing down the ball a bit will give him a chance on backhand plays that may otherwise have been doubles. While extra moisture is a plus in this area, keep in mind that your catcher needs to field bunts there, and hitters coming out of the batter's box need firm footing. By rototilling a high percentage of calcined clay here (keeping it away from batter/runner take-off area), you will hold more moisture and reduce compaction, thus improving playability.

3. TURF EDGE IN FRONT OF HOME PLATE

Professional teams may only take infield practice once per homestand, if at all. One part of infield practice for the catcher is taking throws from the outfield. Getting a read on the difficult short hops on these throws is not easy. It is necessary here to keep a smooth and level edge, so the catcher gets a clean bounce. Another point here is that the turf edge needs to be flush with the dirt, so that bunts can roll consistently to the infield turf.

4. BASELINE WIDTH

Historically, baselines were 6 feet in width, with the foul line directly in the center. Today we see a great deal of variation in this area. Growing the turf in fair territory closer to, or in some cases right against the foul line, can help slow down balls that may have rocketed past your 1st or 3rd baseman for extra-base hits.

5. PITCHER'S DEFENSE

Fielding by the pitcher is usually not very pretty. Usually, it consists of a reflex by a guy teetering on one leg after hurling a ball downhill. The last thing he needs is a wicked hop at the last instant off of a clay-baked patch of dying turf. We all battle the ongoing problem of wear and stress on the turf in front of the mound. Keep the pitcher in mind as you plan how often you will need to bring thick-cut sod into this spot during the season. Pitchers also have to charge off the mound to field bunts. They may plant and throw or do the pivot, spin and fire move to get an out. I am conscious of this when irrigating the infield during a homestand. My goal is to dry down the turf ahead of the game as much as I can, as the schedule allows. Doing so will help with footing in the infield.



6. TURF MANAGEMENT

My goal during the course of a baseball season is to maintain a consistent height of cut for every game day. We mow each day we have a game, so that the players know what to expect. All professional players have their own internal “game clock” that enables them to know how much time they have to make a throw or complete a play. Keeping the speed of the ball consistent allows both the infielders and outfielders to have a comfort level with the field conditions.

Your choice for height of cut will depend on geography, climate and management practices. The manager and players may have a say in that as well. Regardless of choice for height of cut, I have seen good results in the field when the cut is the same each day. Also, be aware of what your mowing patterns can do to the baseball. Take the time when the team is out of town to try and stand up the turf by mowing in alternate directions.

We also have had good results the past few years with the use of trinexapac-ethyl consistently every 15 days. The speed and density of the turf has been very good and the overall quality improved. Seed banking on the infield, particularly in the spring, has been very beneficial as well as we try to maintain dense turf through an entire season.

Finally, with our sand-based field, we have altered our method of aeration slightly. We now topdress first, aerify and clean up the cores, then finish by running a greens roller over the turf. This gives us an extremely smooth finish and helps maintain playability at a high level.

7. THE 1ST BASEMAN

This is a high-traffic area that needs to be micromanaged daily. If your 1st baseman continues to wear out grass in front of the cutout, consider making the cutout larger. There are many options for designs of cutouts that look good and play well. Keep in mind that the cutout in front of the leadoff area can get quite hard if not maintained. Keep a hard, steel rake nearby and monitor moisture.