

Sports Turf Manager

for safe, natural sports turf

1987-2007

CELEBRATING
★ 20 YEARS ★

Spring 2007

VOLUME 20, NUMBER 1

- 3 President's Message
- 4 Coming Events
- 5 Turf Industry News
- 6 Lyon's Cover Story Continued
- 9 Proper Field Management
- 11 Ontario Grass Seeds Summarized
- 13 Happy Anniversary, STA!
- 17 STA Scholarship Renamed
- 18 Member/Past President Profile
- 20 Grasses for Cold Climates

Ontario Turf Seeds

We've done your homework for you! See pages 11-12 for a comprehensive list of turf seed available from Ontario suppliers. STA publishes this valuable information every 2 years.

Sports Field Assessment

DR. ERIC LYONS, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, TURFGRASS SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

An OTS Highlight Article. Assessment is an important part of any management plan, whether talking about managing businesses, facilities or sports fields. It provides information about what is being done correctly and what needs to be improved upon. In many cases, sports field assessment is not done regularly or it is not performed with the correct intent. This article will explore some of the types of sports fields assessment, help determine the goals of sports field assessment and will explore some common oversights in blending assessment with expectations.

Often the only assessment of a sports field occurs at the beginning of a game as the referee quickly peruses the field to assure that it will be safe for play. This is necessary and will identify irrigation heads that are stuck or possibly identify large holes in the field caused by concerts and other alternative uses. However, this assessment will not help the sport field manager fulfill the goals of identifying management problems and moving towards improving overall quality.

One of the most important steps of sports field assessment is to determine and explicitly state the goals of the assessment. There are many things that can be assessed. Generally we think of assessing the playing field but other things need to be addressed concurrently, such as construction, the management plan, the implementation of the management plan and possibly even the classification system that many municipalities and athletic facilities are implementing. The goals for identifying problems... → **page 6**





COVER STORY CONTINUED... FIELD ASSESSMENT

DR. ERIC LYONS, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, TURFGRASS SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

... should be realistic and it is crucial to keep an open mind and try to use the information in a positive way.

Another procedural question that needs to be asked is who should perform the assessment? Should it be done internally or externally, through a consultant or a colleague from a neighbouring facility or municipality? Both options have their merits and downfalls. Internal assessment should be done continually by turfgrass managers but an overall assessment with specific goals can also be achieved internally. Internal assessments have the advantage of a greater historical knowledge of management and the construction of the fields, often allowing assessments to be more accurate. That knowledge is accompanied by preconceived ideas about what the problems may be. In order for assessment to be as valuable as possible, blinders must be taken off and everything must be looked at with an open mind. Alternatively an outside person could be brought in who

is in a position to see more athletic fields and will come in with new ideas. This is also accompanied by a lack of knowledge of the history of construction and legacy of the fields. While generally this is viewed as a downside, the outside assessor is not clouded by “we tried that before,” or “the politics won’t allow that.” This independence can be crucial in “telling it how it is” so that improvements can be made.

When assessing athletic fields the first thing that is done is a general safety assessment, looking for grass cover, potential tripping hazards or collision hazards. After that is completed, the general construction of the field can be assessed. Does the field have a proper crown, are there low lying areas where water can accumulate and is there a place for the water to go once it exits the field? One of the most important tools in a turfgrass managers kit is her/his soil probe. The probe will let you know the thatch accumulation of a field, it can identify areas of compaction,

and probably most importantly it can tell you about the soils used in the field’s construction. One of the most common mistakes is to expect fields constructed very differently to perform the same under identical management regimes. For example, sand-based fields have greatly different moisture and fertility requirements than soil-based fields.

The management program can be assessed on paper for best management practices but it is essential to get out to the fields to see their condition and assess whether or not the management plan is realistic and implemented properly. Following are a few of the primary cultural practices and some of the common problems that can be uncovered through assessment.

Mowing

The management practice that is most crucial to providing safe athletic fields is also the one that can be the root of the

most problems. Mowing needs to be done often and with good equipment. One of the most common problems with the implementation of a management plan occurs with targeted mowing frequencies that are not possible with the equipment or staff available. Another problem with mowing that may be uncovered is problems with proper maintenance of the mowers. Are the mowers cutting cleanly? Is there a consistent cut with no "mo-hawking"? Other problems that are commonly found during assessment are wear patterns being caused by mowers turning too tightly, or compacted areas along mowing patterns.

Fertility

The most common problem with fertility that can be uncovered is a lack of consistency of application, or evidence that fields are just not being fertilized due to inconvenient locality or other mitigating factors. Many fields have areas that consistently do not get fertilized. The only

way to tell if a field or area is fertile or has poor soil conditions is to get out the soil probe and test that soil. Another common problem that a program assessment can uncover is that the type of fertilizer is incorrect. Are the proper fertilizers being applied and are they being applied at the proper nitrogen rate for the prescribed mowing frequencies? As fertility increases, the need for mowing also increases. Many municipalities have responded by lowering their application of nitrogen throughout the season. The result is less growth and less expense for mowing, but this comes at the price of a lack of recovery and overall poor field quality, leading to unsafe playing conditions.

Adjacent Page: Severe compaction on corner of an athletic field caused by nearby construction. **Right:** Understanding the soil is crucial in determining management plans. A soil probe is an invaluable tool and can uncover many underlying causes of problems.



THE SPORTS TURF ASSOCIATION HAS MANY PRIME ADVERTISING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. CALL US!

"The ART of Sports Field Marking"

SIMPLISTIC LINES INC.

FIELD MARKING PAINTS AND APPLICATORS

R.R.#5 Stratford On Canada N5A 6S6
 Tel. 519.348.0653 • Fax: 519.348.0654
 www.simplisticlines.com



Aeration, Topdressing, Overseeding

Aeration is a crucial aspect of any management program. It helps control thatch and organic matter build-up at the soil surface by mixing the soil in with the thatch allowing the microbes in the soil to break down the organic matter. Often aeration is not done aggressively resulting in thatch accumulation and layering if or-

Comprehensive sports field assessment goes beyond looking at the end product and analyzes how the entire management program including use management impacts field quality.

ganic topdressing is being used. If topdressing with compost or other organic material, it is essential that an aggressive aeration program is in place. This is essential to prevent a layer of organic mat-

ter from accumulating at the surface of the playing field, inhibiting healthy turfgrass growth. Assessment can help coordinate different management practices to maximize the effectiveness. Overseeding, a crucial part of any athletic field management plan, should be timed with aeration to maximize soil to seed contact and assure maximum benefit.

Classification Systems

Finally, assessments of the overall classification systems are essential. Often the classification systems are based on inputs and have implied quality for those added inputs with little to no regard for use patterns. Often the fields that are higher on the classification system are expected to be the premier fields yet they are scheduled for the most hours of use. Use patterns must be part of an overall athletic field management plan. While there are

always unscheduled uses from schools and kids playing in parks, it should be remembered that field quality and safety are often most correlated with use patterns.

It is essential that we continue to try to improve how we manage athletic fields and one way to see where we are and decide how to move forward is through comprehensive sports field assessment. This process goes beyond looking at the end product and analyzes how the entire management program including use management impacts field quality. This broad based assessment can lead to new ideas and continuation of successful practices and allows the turfgrass manager to move forward in an effective manner. ♦

Top Left: Special events can cause excessive wear and need to be accounted for in assessing use. **Top Right:** Field failure due to overuse and wet weather.

Master's
Turf Supply Ltd.

890 Fairground Rd. R.R. #4 Langton Ont. N0E 1G0
 Phone (519) 875-4094 Fax (519) 875-4095
 Website: mastersturfsupply.com
 email: mastersturf@uniserve.com



99 John St. N, Box 171
 Harriston, Ontario
 N0G 1Z0
 Phone (519) 338-3840
 Fax (519) 338-2510
 Email spearhead@wightman.ca

**SUPPLIERS OF PREMIUM
 TURF SEED PRODUCTS**

SEEDS