Rain Could Not Washout SFMANJ’s Summer Demonstration Field Day

Brad Park*

Overnight rain and soaking morning showers could not washout Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey’s Summer Demonstration Field Day held at the County College of Morris (CCM), Randolph, NJ on June 28, 2006 – although it did force the SFMANJ Board to make some slight adjustments to the program in what President Ken Mathis appropriately called, “Plan B.”

The morning program, scheduled to be completed outdoors and to include trade show time, was moved inside and featured Super Bowl consultant George Toma. Toma displayed his versatility as a public speaker by giving back-to-back 1.0-hour presentations and fielding questions from attendees following both talks.

Craig Tolley, Professor, CCM and SFMANJ Board Member as well as the CCM staff are graciously acknowledged for hosting the Summer Demonstration Field Day as well as arranging the fine lunch that followed George Toma’s presentations.

The timing of the day’s weather could not have worked out better as the skies cleared and sun broke through for the afternoon outdoor activities. Attendees flowed from booth to booth to visit with the vendors individually as part of the tradeshow. Additionally, attendees were gathered in a group and each vendor was allotted time to describe his or her products and services. As an incentive for attendees to spend time with the vendors, vendor door prizes were eligible only to those attendees who visited a vendor booth and filled-out a ticket available at the booth.

Following the tradeshow, it was time for vendors to demonstrate the latest and greatest sports field equipment. A meeting between representatives of New Jersey equipment giants Storr Tractor and Wilfred MacDonald, as well as CCM personnel, determined that the skinned infield surface was too wet to demonstrate infield grooming equipment. Those vendors demonstrating equipment included: Aer-Core, Inc., Bobcat of North Jersey, CCM's Agronomic Products / Services, Crop Production Services, Inc., Allentown, NJ 08501, Cropping Production Services, Inc., Pittstown, NJ 08867, and Wilfred MacDonald.

The day ended with a talk delivered by Dr. John Grande, Director, Rutgers Snyder Research and Extension Farm. Dr. Grande’s presentation titled, “Calibration of Granular Pesticide Application Equipment” allowed those certified pesticide applicators in attendance to receive one NJ DEP Core credit.

A significant portion of this issue of SFMANJ Update includes photo highlights of the trade show and equipment demonstrations. When making purchasing decisions, please give extra consideration to those vendors who support SFMANJ, as this organization could not exist without their continued participation in SFMANJ events.

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TIPS FOR ATHLETIC FIELD CARE

Dr. David D. Minner*

Use higher than normal seeding rates. In most cases, facilities are needed for play before seeded grass has completed a full year’s growth. Higher seeding rates allow for faster ground coverage and provide better competition with weeds, especially crabgrass. Higher than normal seeding rates that provide faster coverage are Kentucky bluegrass 3 to 4 lbs/1000 sq. ft., tall fescue 8 to 12 lbs/1000 sq. ft., and perennial ryegrass 10 to 15 lbs/1000 sq. ft.

Deeper seeded grass that is still able to germinate survives traffic better. Drill seeding and seeding after hollow coring is preferred. Plants that develop crowns deeper in the soil are more protected than those that are on top of the soil and are easily damaged.

When renovating, keep existing turf if there is at least 30 to 50% grass cover. Mature grass plants, even in a thin stand of seedling turf, unless there is good reason, avoid non-selective killing of all grass in high-traffic areas. Keep the grass you have and overseed with coring and slicing to fill in bare spots.

Use a combination of nitrogen sources. Quick release in the fall, slow release in early summer, and organic nitrogen in the spring or summer.

Use equal N and K for traffic and drought tolerance.

Always have at least one showcase field. Reallocate resources so that you have at least one field that you can use as a control and provide the proper resources and control of the field. Even if resources are limited, don’t spread them out so that all of your fields are average-to-poor or your reputation as a grounds manager may be perceived as average-to-poor. Document what it takes to have at least one good field, and use the information to justify an increase in resources to improve the rest of the fields that are in poor condition.

Build a repertoire of instant solutions that you can count on in time of need. For example, thicken-cut sod, pre-germinated seed, water removal products, smoothing and rolling. Like any good ball team, you should practice these procedures before you try them in game situations.

SOME COMMON MISTAKES

Non-irrigated areas

Using 100% ryegrass for fall repair of summer “burn out”. Each year you will be doing the same thing over and over. Continue to use the ryegrass but add 30% Kentucky bluegrass, especially those from the low-maintenance and drought-tolerant categories.

It is a mistake to anticipate that tall fescue can be used as a substitute for an adequate irrigation system, especially on soccer fields where a smooth ball rolling surface is desired. Even with its excellent drought and traffic tolerance, tall fescue’s bunch habit can cause a clumsy and uneven playing surface when water is lacking and traffic is intense. Should clumping become a problem, interseeding with more tall fescue and temporary watering with a portable rain gun will be needed to regain adequate turf density. If Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass have failed because of limited water then give tall fescue a try. The key point here is not to discourage you from using tall fescue, but instead to encourage you to provide at least temporary irrigation. Watering as little as five times during the summer may be sufficient to maintain an adequate stand of tall fescue.

Close mowing and heavy nitrogen applications of any non-irrigated turf, especially Kentucky bluegrass. This combination of mowing, watering, and fertility is the best way to predispose Kentucky bluegrass to summer patch and loss of turf during summer drought dormancy.

IRRIGATED AREAS

Overwatering – too much, too often, too shallow. As a general rule, turf should be allowed to slightly wilt before irrigation. At this stage of wilting, soils are well-aerated because air has replaced the water that was removed from the soil pore space by the roots. Roots need water to grow, but they also need air-filled pore space. Excessively wet soils become anaerobic and have a distinct sulfur odor of rotten eggs. Root growth is poor in anaerobic conditions. Allow the turf to slightly wilt and then apply about an inch of water. Wait until the turf just begins to wilt before watering again. About 1.0 to 1.5 inches of water per week is sufficient for soil-based fields. Sand-based fields may require more frequent watering.

Mid-day watering of grass. This increases humidity and free moisture near the plant that results in increased disease.

No plan for watering the skin on baseball/softball fields. Don’t forget to install separate heads and valves for watering just the infield dirt. Don’t place the heads so that they water both the dirt and the grass. Watering the skin portion of an infield is just as important as watering the grass. A separate station is needed for watering the skin infield because it is managed differently than grass.

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