

Things I Wish I Knew Earlier

by Don Savard, CSFM, CGM

Remember how you worked so hard to get your field in great shape during the off-season? You endured the weather extremes and scrounged for tools and resources to get the results you were looking for. Diseases, weeds and insects showed-up, but you nursed the turf back to health each time. No matter what problem you encountered, whether it was machine breakdowns, someone on your crew not showing up for some reason or your boss assigning you an extra project you didn't see coming, you stayed the course. Why you even checked up on the field nights and weekends on your own time just to be sure everything was all right.

You never gave up.

Now, the team has begun their season and they are starting to systematically destroy everything you worked hard to build. Why it seems as though the coaches are having the players wear out parts of the field on purpose, for spite! And to add insult to injury, they are leaving trash around, not even using those new trash cans you provided (Plastic bottles everywhere- no respect!). You feel a range of emotions; anger, frustration and negativity (and maybe some self pity mixed in).

Sound familiar?

I used to dread pre-season because I thought my fields were being abused. I was taking it personally! In our business, we can't let that get us down. A mentor, much wiser than I, took me aside once and explained to me (in simple terms) some essential things I needed to learn.

Field wear and tear is a given.

Sports fields are meant to be used. Our job is to create and maintain safe, playable sports surfaces. Expert sports turf management is all about reacting effectively to field use (and overuse). Traffic from players causes surface wear, such as abrasion to the plant tissues, soil compaction and divoting. Even synthetic surfaces are not immune from wear - infill becomes displaced, fibers break down and seams tear. Fortunately, the science of sports field management is expanding and there are more new tools, techniques and technologies to help us do our jobs better.

The best strategy is a well thought out management plan and good site specific cultural practices. These include proper mowing; a nutrient management plan based on soil test results, soil aeration, irrigation, overseeding (or sodding) with improved turfgrasses and appropriate control methods to manage weeds insect and diseases. If resources are scarce, take pictures and document what is happening to show the owners. This will help to make a case for better tools and materials.

Getting mad doesn't make it better, and can make it worse.

Someone once told me that an expectation is a resentment waiting to happen. Don't expect others to care about your field like you do. A sports field manager carrying resentment



can easily become a target for ridicule and will have a hard time commanding respect and credibility. Don't let that happen.

Relax! Take care of yourself. Are you eating right, getting enough exercise and sleep? Make time

to recharge and heal the body, mind and

spirit. Sometimes the negativity doesn't go away easily. Don't let it eat away at you. Vent! Otherwise you risk taking it out on your family, friends or co-workers. Try to find a trusted advisor, perhaps another sports field manager and talk it out. Damage to your field is going to happen, the question is when. When it does happen, deal with it like a professional.

Pride is one of the seven deadly sins.

It is good to feel good about the work that you do. Taking the feel good to the extreme can be unhealthy. Avoid letting your work define you. You are more than just your job. When your work distracts you from your family and friends it can make you dull. Having other interests keeps your mind sharp. There is more to life than your or my sports field. Yep, it's true. Really!

Unless you paid for it, you don't get to make the rules.

Acceptance of what you have to work with gives you power because you don't have to waste time dwelling on what is wrong (it is what it is). Instead, you can now focus on doing the next right thing. The only thing that you own and control is your personal "brand". Your brand is how your skill set, knowledge and personal style define the overall results that others perceive. Take any two sports field managers, put them on the same site with the identical resources and conditions and you will likely see some differences in the operations and end results. While you might be powerless over certain aspects of the job, you still have control over your brand, quality of work, attitude and finding opportunities for personal growth.

Grass is more forgiving than people.

In spite of your best field management practices, things beyond your control happen. One time, I was informed that my field was going to be used as a parking lot for an event! Whether or not there is rational thinking behind an owner's decision, what will be remembered most, is how well you as the sports field manager dealt with the news. Which response do you think is the best - An outright "Oh hell no!" followed by sulking or "Let me think about it and get back to you- oh yes, we can do this but here are the costs and potential consequences?" Either way, in the end you will have to deal with the aftermath. And the "can do" sports field manager will always come out ahead because he or she makes things happen and give the owners what they want again and again.

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