

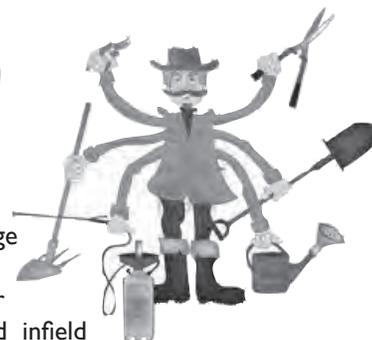
Keeping Your Edge

By Don Savard, CSFM, CGM

It's hard work staying sharp on the job! Finding time and funding for job related training can be challenging. Sometimes, when the traditional forms of sports field education, (i.e. seminars, field days and clinics) seem to cover the same old topics consider trying something different. Something like going to another facility and helping out for a day as a guest member of the crew. I did that recently!

It all started when Rich Watson, Sports Turf Manager for the Pine Hill Board of Education invited me to help out during a Saturday baseball tournament. Nothing was scheduled at my facility that day, so I was free to go. The weather was not looking promising, though. Thunderstorms overnight and threatening skies in the morning made me wonder if Rich Watson's crew could make things happen and get the games in. After breakfast I called Rich and he said, "Come on up!"

When I arrived at the Overbrook High School baseball field, teams and fans were patiently waiting (despite a 1 hour delay) while the Overbrook grounds crew was hard at work putting the finishing touches on the playing surface. It would have been understandable to have called off the games because of the wet conditions, and for many sports field managers it would have been a no brainer. Rich Watson and the Overbrook grounds crew (Bill Loftus and Carmelo



Anguila) are not your average K-12 groundskeepers. They were on the job 5 hours earlier raking in drying materials and infield conditioners to their expertly maintained infield skin. I helped set a couple of bases and the game was ready to begin.

The "40th Annual Joe Hartman Diamond Classic" is a premier baseball tournament in South Jersey. The top 16 teams play a Round Robin single elimination tournament. The Overbrook field is a sought after venue for this matchup.

I like visiting another facility because I can see all the things that they do right. I get to tour their shop and see the tools and materials that they use. From the way bulk dry mound clay is reconstituted to the right consistency with a scant amount of water to repair a mound or a batter's box to the way they have configured a small trailer to convey all of the tools and supplies necessary for infield maintenance. I have long admired an infield drag they use to groom their infield (I hope I can get a copy of the plans so I can build one). Between their homemade and their store-bought equipment, I get some inspiration for tools that I would like to have. I even share with the Overbrook crew tales of some of the tools that I use such as the big rubber mallet and the small squirt bottle of water used

Continued on page 18

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Continued from page 5

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to pack clay on the mound (actually an idea shared by Larry Divito of the Minnesota Twins). I learn some new techniques I would like to try when I get back to campus.

I like talking shop with other sports field managers. Nobody else really understands what we do, or what we have to deal with. We can cover many topics ranging from agronomics to equipment to which source of materials we like the best. Who better than another experienced sports field manager can give you insight about the soft skills of human relations with all of the people we serve. In conversation with other sports field managers I usually discover that (a) somebody else has already experienced what I am experiencing; (b) my situation is not as bad as I think it is; (c) I feel validated for the things that I am doing right.

I really enjoyed my visit with Rich, Bill and Carmelo. It was great working with an experienced crew. I recommend to anyone wanting to improve their skills, to spend a day with another sports field manager as a guest crew member. It is an amazing experience.

Don Savard is a Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) and Certified Grounds Manager (CGM); Director, Athletic Facilities and Grounds, Salesianum School; and a member of the SFMANJ Board of Directors.



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