Fields of change

More effort needs to be directed to the fact that turf is a growing plant that needs a certain amount of care to continue to grow properly.

By FLOYD PERRY

The climate for better and safer athletic facilities is changing on all levels. In my travels across the country to more than 5500 facilities, I have seen a complete metamorphosis in attitudes involving athletic/football/soccer fields:

- Gates are locked after school hours.
- Permission slips and liability waivers are required to use fields, thanks to the frequent lawsuits.
- Internal scheduling regulates the amount of weekly traffic.

For example, at a particular campus there is one field used to share football and soccer play. The football team has the field two hours each week, on Thursday before the Friday game. The band has the field for two hours a week on Wednesday. Soccer team gets two hours to work on game patterns, with no drills. And outside institutions—concerts, art shows, fairs—are not getting the fields during the season.

These procedures were not put into place overnight, but became policy after a serious injury lawsuit over a poorly maintained field.

Also, this institution had the foresight to set up enough practice areas for individual activities, including their physical education program.

Cross-field use

The more practical way to create safe athletic turf—field rotation is not practical in many locations—is cross-field design.

Divide your main field into two opposite length fields and avoid play in the center. Outstanding facility managers got this idea from the design of inside basketball courts with side baskets and different colored lines.
If the coaches and field personnel work together to create quality turf by moving their workouts around and shifting their heavy work to the end zones or sidelines, they would have a better chance of keeping a strong bio-mass of turf for their big ball games.

**The pendulum swings**

Some institutions and recreation boards are creating safety committees of peers to help solve this 21st Century dilemma of not having sufficient quality turf for young people to play on. Some colleges, high schools and recreation boards have set aside funding for equipment which aids in turf protection and establishment. I tip my groundskeeping hat to those groups.

Turf grows by the inch and is killed by the foot. Truer words were never spoken.

—The author is president of GMS For Sports Fields, Orlando, Fla. He has written The Pictorial Guide to Quality

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