

MANAGING MULTI-PURPOSE FACILITIES

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In managing multi-purpose facilities we need to discuss four basic principals: developing a maintenance plan that is site specific to your needs, identifying the proper equipment that is needed, setting up a good line of communication within your organization and with your user groups, and becoming more professional as a sports turf manager through education. The common goal we are all trying to strive for at any level is to provide top quality sport turf facilities which in turn will give all athletes at any level of the game a chance to perform to the best of their ability on a superior field.

The key to any sports turf managers success is not merely how knowledgeable he/she is with the agronomic side, but how successful he/she communicates with the users of the facility, the board, and the staff. In order to stream line communication with the user groups, I would suggest organizing your users into a board. Choose one key individual from that organization, maybe a president or vice president. Invite them to sit on your newly developed board. This board would give input on any major and minor renovation or construction for your facility. They would also have monthly meetings to discuss the group’s needs, facility issues, special events, and updating both boards on organization issues. This should be looked at as an education process. You are the educator and your newly formed board are the students! Discuss with them some of the agronomic principals that are needed to grow and sustain healthy turf on your facility. Explain what are your site limitations and needs for the maintenance department in order to provide them with the standards they have set. Make sure in any discussions that you relate your material in terms that they will be able to comprehend. Remember that the average person has no real grasp of what really goes into providing a top quality facility/field.

As a sports turf manager, the first thing you need to do is define your site! How will you be able to effectively communicate with people if you don’t understand what is under the ground? Start with the soil structure. Conduct a soil structure test that will tell you the exact make up of the soil structure of your facility/field. You will also want to conduct a soils test that will shed light on the soils needs. This will tell you what the pH is of the soil along with what the nutrient needs are to grow and sustain healthy turf. Develop your fertility program based on two to three soil tests a year. If you would like to take it further to make sure the plant is getting the nutrients it needs, perform tissue tests. The important thing is to test often and make modification to your program as changes occur. Drainage is another key! Does your site have any? If so, what type, depth, and spacing were used? Does your site have an irrigation system? If so, what type and does it operate properly and efficient? Perform topography of your facility/field. This will help you identify the existing grades and patterns on your facility/field. Make copies of your survey and have them readily available for staff to mark up problem areas as they form. Along with the topography, you will want to make sure you have an updated copy of the sites as-built drawings. If one is not available, make one. Basically, you want to perform

an audit of your facility so you can properly identify your site limitations and needs. The next step would be to communicate with the user groups to identify the facility/field scheduling. Define how many games are going to be scheduled on each field. If at all possible, set up a facility grid sheet that will help you organize the schedules and make sure you are not over booking one field more than the other. Remember the wear and tear factors for the type of sport the field is being used for. Traffic is another issue for multi-use facilities. Field scheduling can play a big part in handling the congestion caused by trying to get too many people into the facility at the same time. Is there sufficient parking to handle the amount of people that will be attending the events at your facility/field? The last thing you want to do when defining your site is identify your key contact people within the organization that will be responsible for handling weather or facility related problems. Make sure that the individual is accessible at all times when events are planned at the facility/field.

Developing your cultural and maintenance practices should now be easier. With the open communication between you and the user groups you should be able to define the facility/field standards. You will then want to take those standards and compare them to your current maintenance and cultural practices and adjust them where it is needed to meet those standards. Each issue, mowing, field layout, painting, core aerification, over-seeding, topdressing, fertilization, weed control, pest control, and diseases will all need to be set up so you can meet the standards that have been set. Sound agronomic principals will guide you in setting up a yearly calendar to help maintain the facility/field. Explore every option you can possibly use to manage and maintain the facility/field to the set standards.

As a sports turf manager, you're never done learning. There is a vast bank of knowledge at your finger tips to help you solve that problem you thought would never be able to be solved. If you have the opportunity to get an Associates or Bachelors degree in turf or related field, pursue it! Workshops and seminars put on by your local sports turf managers association chapter, state turfgrass research program, and vendors are all valuable networking and education opportunities for you. Become active in your community! You never know when someone in your community may be the quickest fix to a pesky problem. Look into becoming a Certified Sports Field Manager through the STMA. If you want to be a professional, then you need to become certified! Remember no one person has all the answers, but together your peers are your greatest resources.