

# Doc's Dugout - An Inning from our Past & Present

by Dr. Kent Kurtz, STMA Historian

## Remembering Dr. Fred Grau

Our good friend, the late Dr. Fred Grau, wrote a piece in 1984 entitled, "For Sports, The Word is **SMOOTH**."

It states, "Basketball players running full tilt down the court have no fear of a rut, an unexpected hole or a sudden high point which could cause the player to trip, fall, and sustain possible severe injuries. The court is **SMOOTH**!"

Tennis players enjoy smooth, unruffled surfaces on which to enjoy their vigorous fast foot-work game. They have no cause to fear twisted ankles due to a rough, rutted surface. The surface is **SMOOTH**!

Other sports such as racquetball, handball, lawn bowling and baseball are favored with smooth playing surfaces. On rare occasions a baseball outfield may be less than 100% smooth. Few outfielders will tolerate an uneven rough condition for long. Sports turf managers can ill afford to be the cause of ankle injuries to valuable players.

Football comes in various sizes and categories. Artificial surfaces are the ultimate in **SMOOTHNESS** but lack something in resiliency and cushion. Big league and col-

lege stadiums cater to the **SMOOTH**.

Soccer is a vigorous running sport played on natural turf fields. Here, as in basketball, the quality smooth is of utmost importance. It is a sad commentary that some schools have been forced to close out this popular sport because there have been so many injuries. It is **ROUGH RUTTED** fields that allow players to incur ankle and knee injuries. A soccer player running hard, stepping into a hole, is roughly equivalent to an automobile, going 50 miles per hour, hitting an unseen chuck hole. Both types of injuries, flesh and mechanical, can be repaired at a cost of time and money. Flesh and blood may not be restored to its original perfection as can the cars.

Why do we, parents, players and spectators alike, continue to tolerate rough, dangerous sports playing surfaces? Is it apathy? Is it lack of equipment, knowledge, money? All three can be furnished if we care enough."

Dr. Grau's article went on to note that, besides his years of expounding the cause of "Better Turf," encouraging students *continued on page 15*

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## Doc's Dugout

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and consulting on fields -- he instigated other venues to improve field conditions.

One of these efforts involved the national PTA organization. Working with their Program Director, Dr. Carter, Grau helped form the initial concept, "BAT TRITTY" (Better Athletic Turf - To Reduce Injuries To The Young).

This concept gave way to PTA/PTI and eventually to the National Sports Turf Council which met biannually at the USDA Research facility in Beltsville, Maryland, and included many major industry groups: STMA (represented by Kent Kurtz), The Lawn Institute (Roberts), the NFLPA (Macik),

PGMS (Shoulders), USDA (Murray), commercial companies (Watson, etc.), the University of Maryland (Turner), Virginia Polytechnic (Hall), Penn State University (Harper & Waddington) and others.

By 1984, The National Sports Turf Council was acting to coordinate efforts to improve turf and playing surfaces primarily of fields at the elementary, junior and high school levels. The PTA/PTI and National Sports Turf Council never reached their potential due to the deaths of Dr. Fred Grau and Jack Murray and they no longer exist. The challenge remains and addressing it is part of the STMA outreach.



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## How Do You Do...?

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communicate with your Athletic Directors. SHOW them the conditions, make them put their boots on and come splash around with you so they know exactly what you're working with.

### **Answered by Alan Dungey, Frontier Field (NY)**

Strong cultural practices are the first defense for any field which experiences extreme weather conditions. In the Northeast, we experience long harsh winters, cold spring night temperatures and, in the hot summer months, the only precipitation is heavy rain storms.

Spring play begins when fields are dormant, so any repairs or renovations must be done in the fall. Aeration and fertilization in the fall help ensure a healthy, well draining field for spring. Evergreen turf blankets can be used for high traffic areas to help control ice damage and promote earlier spring green up. All skinned areas should be prepared in the fall so the only efforts in the spring are to dry the field.

We rely on our fields for heavy use during any weather. When we attempt to play in poor weather, we try not to over react to a problem; it often looks worse than it is. Making the field playable when you have to use it is the focus. You can cause more harm to a field by trying to provide optimal conditions. When the weather changes back to normal, you then have to work harder to get the field back to normal. The toughest decision is whether to jeopardize the field's future for the event that day.

