

# Managing Multi-Purpose Fields

by Boyd "Rob" Montgomery, Sylvania Recreation

The key to managing multi-use fields is understanding all the elements that impact them. Field scheduling, field painting, mowing height, grass color, field layout, spectator area, maintenance program, and the site all play a key part in managing your multi-use field. Another key is an open line of communication between the turf manager and all the user groups. Last, but not least, a turf manager must be an educator for the user groups, upper management, and elected boards.

To get an understanding of some of the key elements requires a lot of effort on the turf manager's part. At Pacesetter, we try to organize all user groups together and discuss with them what their ideal field conditions are, how they want the field painted,

mowing height of the grass, game schedules, and field layouts. Make sure you educate the groups on both the cost side and agronomic side of their request. For example, a group might want the grass to be cut a foot to one and a half inch height. If your site happens to not have a grass cultivar that can be cut at that height, you'll need to educate the group on the effects of cutting the grass at a lower cutting height than recommended for that grass. You could discuss alternatives such as renovation or overseeding with a new cultivar that might withstand lower cutting heights. Present cost figures for both and discuss how a project like that might be paid for. We also invite one representative from each outside user group to attend all of our board

meetings. This allows the groups to stay in touch with the operations of the park. As a turf manager you must understand what we do to prepare a field. The average person has no concept of how much time, labor, and materials go into the finished project. That is why an open line of communication is so important. If you cannot discuss situations with groups and educate them to our business, then you will have difficulty as a turf manager.

The site is one place to start in managing multi-use fields. You as a turf manager must know what you are dealing with under the grass. What kind of a soil structure is in place? Does your site have heavy clay or are you built on a sandy site? Both cases have totally different maintenance programs. Soil cores should be pulled and soil test run to determine the soil pH and levels of macro and micronutrients in the soil. A tissue test should also be performed on the turf. What type of drainage does your site have? Do you have in-ground or above ground irrigation? Research and obtain as much information about your site as you can. As a turf manager you want to make sure you have an up to date, as built, drawing of your fields. Make copies of these drawings and, as problem areas surface, highlight them on the drawings. This will help you in tracking and in figuring out the problem.

Understanding some of the key elements for multi-use fields is very important. On field scheduling, how many games can be played on one field? I will give you an example that happened at Pacesetter. One of our travel soccer leagues that plays out at the park in the fall had a 160 game schedule. In the summer, the group contacted the park and we informed them that

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we would lay out four full sized fields and two medium sized fields for them. The group then turned around and gave that information to the league schedulers. I received the schedule the night of the first game and went through it the next day. Out of the 160 games scheduled at the park, 156 games were scheduled on three of the fields. The remaining 4 games were scheduled on two of the remaining three fields. This meant one field we had laid out was not even being used. Out of the 156 games that were played on the three fields, 77 games were scheduled for one field alone. As you can see scheduling can be a key to cutting down the wear and tear on your fields. Here again, communication and education helped the scheduler understand why we needed to work for a more even schedule. We have since met with the scheduler and laid out a uniform scheduling policy for the number of fields we lay out. Another aspect that goes into scheduling for a multi-use facility is parking. On a given weekend at Pacesetter Park, we can have 2,000-3,000 people move through the facility. If you do not communicate with your schedulers the importance of staggering start times you will encounter a traffic nightmare. With baseball, softball, soccer, lacrosse, flag football, and tournaments all competing for parking spaces, you must convey the importance to the user groups of good scheduling practices.

Mowing practices are a key to keeping healthy lush turf. For multi-use fields a standard will need to be set. Since you will have two or three different sports playing games in one area, and each of them having a different view on how the grass should be cut, you will need to set a standard. First, know what type of grass you have. Next, what are the recommended cut heights for that variety? Once you have established a cutting height you must realize the closer you get to the lowest cutting height on that grass the more likely it

will be that your grass will be stressed faster, cut more frequently, need more fertilizer and water, be more susceptible to disease and insects, and wear more. At Pacesetter we have an old variety of Kentucky bluegrass. We mow the soccer and baseball fields at a 1 fl" height. Our frequency is three days a week during the active growing season and two days a week the remainder of the mowing season.

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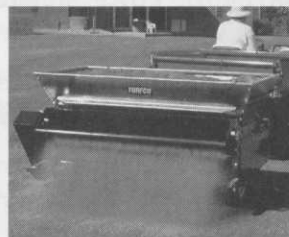
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Field layout and painting is another key aspect in managing multi-use fields. As a turf manager you must research the proper sizes for regulation play. After a survey of your site you will need to look at the layout in relation to the sun setting, spectators, and boundaries. For open area fields portable goals are the best

solution. This allows the turf manager to change the field's location from season to season, allowing the wear areas to be in different locations each season. If multiple fields are going to be on the same area you must make sure that one field is not too close to the other so that neither spectators nor participants are at risk of injury.

As far as painting, you must be aware of all the additional lines that might be needed on fields i.e. coaches boxes, spectators lines. If you are laying multiple fields on top of each other make sure a different color is used for each. Keep up on your field painting, use a paint that won't harm the grass but will give you good color and longevity. Remember if you have healthy grass, the more you water, the more you will have to paint and mow.

Good sound cultural practices are also a key. Core aeration on heavy clay soils is a big part of growing healthy turf. Typically we core before and after each spring and fall season. We also add during-the-season coring if we have above average rainfall that would add to the compaction. Each time we core we do four different patterns and let the cores decompose on the surface. The only time we will remove the cores is during the season. A heavy overseeding and topdressing program also is a key. Of course, this can be very expensive for multi-use facilities due to the vast acreage. If money is the issue then the overseeding aspect can be concentrated on the wear and use patterns of each of the fields. Your seed also is a key. If you are looking for a quick cover in goal areas, for example, we use a mixture of three-way rye, fertilizer, and absorbing material. If you were doing general overseeding then grass cultivars that are comparable to the one already present would be the best. Topdressing can be done in some of the more severe areas of wear. Make sure when you topdress your facility that you use the same soil material that is present. If you don't, you will start to create a layering effect in those areas.

Of course, one of the big keys is a good fertility program. Through the soil and tissue tests you preformed, you should be able to establish a good fertility program. You will need to perform

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these tests twice a year. Monitor your pH levels and macro & micro nutrient levels. If one is getting high or low then a corrective application might be needed. For a regular maintenance fertility program a good quality fertilizer will be needed. I have set Pacesetter up on a program that spoon feeds (similar to a golf course) the turf. Instead of making 4 or 5 applications at 1 lb./1,000 of nitrogen each year, I have broken it down to six minor applications and one major application. I do the major application in the fall and generally use around 1.25 to 1.5 lbs./1,000 of nitrogen. The minor applications range from fi lbs./1,000 to fl lbs./1,000 of nitrogen per feeding. This allows the turf to have a continuous feeding. For the late spring, summer, and early fall applications I use a slow release fertilizer. For the summer applications it is generally a 100% slow release product. The other times I generally use a 50% slow release product. To stimulate root growth in the spring and early fall growing seasons I use a higher phosphorus fertilizer. In early October, I generally add a liquid iron treatment (15-0-0) to keep things nice and green. Fertility programs need to be adjusted to your site. What works for one site might need adjusting for

another. That is why knowing your site and staying up with your testing is so important. Pre-emergent (spring) and Post-emergent (fall) treatments for broadleaf weeds must be done at the proper times. Chemical treatments for insects and diseases should be done on an as-needed program. Diagnose the problem first, before you spray any chemical. Look at all aspects of the problem before you decide on using a chemical for treatment. Remember all aspects of the disease triangle have to be present on your site (host, pathogen, environment) to have a disease occur. If insects are the problem, monitor the population. If increasing pressure is occurring then treatments will need to be made. For example, timing is a key for controlling grubs. You must target them in the early instar stages.

Multi-use facilities are a challenge. That challenge can be greatly compounded when open lines of communication between user groups, maintenance staff, and recreational programmers are closed. Turf managers need to be very open to all aspects of the communication end of a multi-use field as well as the agronomic side.



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