

# Sports Turf Manager

FOR BETTER, SAFER SPORTS TURF. WINTER 2012. VOL. 25. NO. 4

## History of Sports Field Turfgrass Surfaces

James B. Beard, PhD, DA, and VMM

Outdoor games, in which teams attempt to hit, carry, kick, or throw some form of a varied-shaped ball into, over, or across the opponents designated goal have a long history in most parts of the world. Early “team” games frequently involved no rules, an unlimited number of “players” – usually male, and even playing fields that extended from one village to the next. This combination resulted in dangerous body contact of all sorts, serious injuries and even death. Eventually a few competition rules for these ancient games may have been agreed to by the competing teams on game day. The playing surface could be composed of varying types of undulating landscapes including streams and vegetation ranging from trees to bare areas. The location was decided by the local host team. The first truly nation-wide rules for many sports were not developed until the 1850 to 1900 period in Great Britain. This resulted in sports within other countries responding similarly.

Proper documentation as to the true origins of most outdoor sports played on grass has been lost in the mists of antiquity. While recognizing this limitation, attempts

MANY OF THE TEAM  
SPORTS SURFACES  
EVENTUALLY EVOLVED  
TO A GRASSY SURFACE  
KEPT SHORT BY  
GRAZING ANIMALS,  
ESPECIALLY SHEEP.

are made herein to suggest a possible time frame for key cultural practices based on scattered bits of historical records. Many of the team sports surfaces eventually evolved to a grassy surface kept short by grazing animals, especially

### OTS HIGHLIGHT

Continued inside on  
pages 9-11.

sheep. The evenly distributed rainfall and intensive sheep husbandry in Great Britain contributed to this country being a pioneer in the development of turfgrass sports surfaces. These play areas were being “marked off” by the late-1440’s. An early technique for marking the boundaries was via a plow furrow.

During the 1500’s areas of land were being designated and reserved as sites for sports activities.

#### Initiation of Cultural Inputs.

Rolling became important for bowls and cricket as clubs were formed and a permanent ground acquired. Manuring was avoided or infrequent, especially on larger sports fields so that laborious



## Inside Features

**12 STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING HEAVILY-USED FIELDS** Some keys to successful management.

**16 DEVELOPING A LONG TERM PLAN FOR SPORTS FIELDS IN WATERLOO** The City of Waterloo Outdoor Sports Field Strategy

**22 SYNTHETIC TURF FIELDS: HOW DO I CHOOSE?** Understanding your needs: Programming, design requirements and risk mitigation.