

or hand held grinder. The larger diameter wheel provides a more appropriate bevel to the blade. The slower rotation speed and courser textured wheel help to maintain blade temper by minimizing heat and as such minimize blade wear. In addition to maintaining a sharp edge, blades should periodically be checked for balance and trueness. There is nothing more obvious on an otherwise well manicure field than either dull blades or a bent blade. I know of businesses that sharpen blades every day. I would recommend sharpening every sixteen to twenty hours of use. Under no circumstances would I allow blade sharpening to go more than once per week under normal use.

In addition to blade quality the mower deck should be cleaned. Accumulation of clippings under the mower deck interferes with proper airflow, clipping discharge and quality of cut.

In order to optimize efficiency when mowing, I typically choose to maintain common ground at a higher height of cut thus allowing for a once per week mowing frequency while mowing the playing areas lower and more frequently. This only works if the mowing height of your machine can be adjusted efficiently without too much down time. On one site in particular due to budgetary restraints I was mowing the entire complex on a 4 – 5 day schedule in an attempt to keep the playing areas under control. At this mowing frequency I was unable to maintain the mowed height of the playing areas at 2.5" without excessive clipping accumulation. For this reason I started mowing the playing areas on a 3 – 4 day schedule at 2.5" and extended the frequency on the common ground to once per week (every other mowing of playing areas) while increasing the mowed height to 3.5". I managed to maintain the same number of man-hours per month, keep costs within the budget and increase the quality of the playing areas. The common areas showed little change in quality. If anything the common ground improved in quality and appearance due to reduced turf stress and less clipping buildup.

I believe turf maintained at a higher height of cut will maintain better density and quality as long as the 1/3 rule is followed, than would turf maintained at a lower height of cut while not following the 1/3 rule.

For me, a ¼" mowing height adjustment dictated by varying environmental conditions in combination with slight modifications to the mowing schedule have proven to be the greatest asset in maintaining a quality athletic turf. In order for this strategy to work mowing must be a priority in your work schedule.

If you are like most and maintain your athletic fields within a five-day workweek, you are limited in scheduling options if you intend to mow on a 3 or 4-day schedule. First, save Wednesday as a rain day. Monday & Tuesday, Thursday & Friday are mowing days. If you mow on Monday, you can either mow Thursday or Friday. If you mow Tuesday, you are limited to your follow up mowing being Friday. If you mow Thursday you are limited to your next mowing being Monday. If you mow Friday, you can either mow Monday or Tuesday.

"Tricks of the trade" for maintaining the appearance and playability of your turf

when mowing on a 3 – 4 day schedule.

1. Prioritize between playing areas and common ground.

2. Watch the weather reports and vary your Monday – Tuesday or Thursday - Friday mowing day based on the forecast

3. If growth patterns allow, you can lower the height by ¼" on the 3 day cycle to gain some wiggle room in the schedule

4. If you mow in the rain, or when the grass is excessively wet, you can raise the height ¼" to minimize clumping and lower it back on the next 3 day cycle

5. If clippings start to accumulate you can mow 3 consecutive 3-day cycles to help eliminate excessive clippings. (Tuesday, Friday, Monday, Thursday.) In this situation you would have to mow the following Monday to maintain a maximum of 4 days between mowings.

6. If you miss a day, raise the height ¼" the following day and lower it back on the next normally scheduled mowing day.

7. As growth slows later into the summer and again in late fall move to a 4 – 5 day schedule by mowing Friday, Wednesday, Monday, Friday (in that order). It's the only way to maintain a 4 - 5 day mowing schedule without mowing on the weekend. Only every other week requires two mowings,

providing substantial labor savings while maintaining turf quality.

Regardless of what type of turf you maintain, when it comes to mowing management, "the proof is in the putting".

*Jim Hermann is President of Total Control Inc., Athletic Field Management and Consulting. ♦

Don't Miss the 2004 Rutgers Turfgrass Research Field Days!

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The 2004 Rutgers Turfgrass Research Field Days - "The Finest Programs in the World" – are an annual highlight on the calendar of events sponsored by the New Jersey Turfgrass Association and the Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science. The Lawn and Landscape Field Day will be held **Wednesday, July 28, 2004** at the **Adelphia Research Farm**. Registration will begin at **8:00 am** and the first 50 registrants will receive a free cap. Presentations will be given on a wide range of topics including turfgrass species that are commonly utilized on New Jersey sports fields and the latest weed control programs and products. Research plot tours will conclude at 3:00 pm.

The Golf and Fine Turf Research Field Day will be held on **Thursday, July 29, 2004** at **Hort. Farm II – Ryders Lane** in North Brunswick, NJ. Registration will begin at **8:30 am**. Tours will end at 3:00 pm.

A separate \$35.00 fee (includes lunch and morning coffee) will apply for each day, but those who wish to attend both Field Days may do so. **Pesticide recertification credits will be offered on both days.** For additional information please call Dick Caton 856-853-5973; or Marlene Karasik 732-932-9400 x 339.

Also, it's never too early to mark your calendars for the **New Jersey Turfgrass and Landscape Expo 2004**. Expo 2004 will be held **December 7, 8, and 9, 2004** at the Trump Taj Mahal Casino-Resort in Atlantic City, NJ. ♦