

New Jersey Green Expo: Turf and Landscape Conference 2012

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By Debbie Savard



The Politics of Sports Field Management

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something done. From being the “tenth man” on the baseball team to the event coordinator for a non-sporting event, we are the hub of the wheel. It’s great when our customers are happy and it’s miserable when they’re not.

Remember that a problem is the difference between what somebody has and what they want. Our job is to solve problems; big and small. Unfortunately we face challenges such as resources, time, weather and the unexpected. Even when we do everything right or at least the best we can, somebody can be dissatisfied, usually over the small problems. They complain. We get defensive. Things escalate. We feel like we get no respect. They feel that we are not listening to them. Frustration sets in and breeds distrust. There is less cooperation. Communication stops, our effectiveness shrinks and nobody is happy. Sound familiar?

When discord strikes, both sides own the problem. Let’s look at the part we own.

When Sports Field Managers and their customers have disagreements resulting in communication breakdown, there are no winners. Let’s look further into the dynamics of Human Relations.

Good Human Relations skills begin with Respect. The American psychologist Abraham Maslow described human self esteem needs — the need for respect from others and the need for self-respect. Without the fulfillment of these needs, Maslow

suggests, an individual feels discouraged, weak and inferior. Self respect begins with honest self knowledge and self awareness. Respect from others often entails recognition, acceptance, and appreciation. Respect from others must be earned. Self respect, on the other hand, is an inside job.

Self respect begins with self care. Good self care results in good self control. Occasionally, we all find ourselves hungry, angry, lonely or tired. When we feel any of those ways, we are emotionally vulnerable and our self control can be compromised. It is good to take care of ourselves. If our needs are neglected, we are not at our best. And if we are not taking care of our interests, how can we take care of others?

Respect for others is based on self-respect and follows the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” It is the value that makes the world a more decent and civilized place.

But this is where it starts to get sticky. The world is not always a more decent and civilized place. Things happen. People disagree. Conflicts occur.

Have you ever had this happen to you? You are in the middle of preparing your field for an event. A team comes out and starts using your field while you are working on it. You approach the coach and explain what you are doing. In spite of what you say, not only does the team stay, but they damage the field as well.

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Problems facing sports field managers:

Refining cultural practices to better manage high traffic sports fields

Public agencies often rely on contractors to apply fertilizers to sports fields. Following a public bidding process, landscape and sports field firms are awarded contracts to perform various tasks, including the application of a defined quantity of nitrogen (N) per unit area, typically over multiple applications. In some cases, fields scheduled to receive an ample supply of N display insufficient growth and have an off-color appearance, classic indicators of turfgrass in-need of N. While not all contractors will “short” the school or town on N quantities, many contractors apply N as liquid applications and it is difficult for school and town representatives to fully audit what is in the contractor’s spray tank.

Granular-formulated fertilizers can allow for better auditing of contractor-applied fertilizer applications as well as allow for more N to be applied per individual application with lower potential for turfgrass leaf tip burn compared to liquid fertilizers. For example, to apply 0.75 lbs N/1000 ft² to an 80000 ft² football field and surrounds using a fertilizer that is 25% N (e.g. 25-0-0), it will require 240 lbs of fertilizer (e.g. five 50-lb bags of 25-0-0). Bags can be counted following the application to ensure that the appropriate quantity of fertilizer has been applied and thus, high traffic sports fields are better able to recuperative from damage.

Irrigation

Automatic irrigation systems are an important tool in the management of sports fields and are highly preferable to water reels and certainly non-irrigated sports field and grounds sites.

Too often, however, automatic systems are simply set on a program and then ignored resulting in some fields becoming saturated with water and a subsequent loss in turfgrass traffic tolerance. Water-saturated sports field soils may be a result of irrigation programs being allowed to run immediately following rain events or systems set to deliver a quantity of water that the sports field soil does not have the capacity to accept. In either case, the sports field manager must regularly assess soil moisture (i.e. buy a soil probe!), view weather data, and know the ability of his/her sports field to accept varying quantities of rainfall and irrigation in order to program the automatic irrigation system accordingly.

Cultivation

Poor design and construction methods can accelerate turf loss on sports fields. If designed with inadequate surface pitch and/or manipulated when wet, even those soils that may have supported agronomic crops will be prone to poor drainage and compaction, conditions that are not conducive to growing healthy, traffic tolerant turfgrass.

Deep slicing and deep tine cultivation are methods to alleviate compaction at deeper soil depths, often a result of poor

construction procedures. Severely compacted soils may not readily allow a tine to penetrate to a soil depth greater than several inches. In these cases, it can be advantageous to first perform deep slicing. These tools are equipped with heavy-duty rotating knives that cut through and fracture the soil.

Cultivation in turfgrass is more routinely performed with machines equipped with tines (hollow or solid) capable of penetrating to a depth of 3 to 4 inches. Use of hollow tines allows for the removal of a core and can be useful to alleviate shallow soil compaction, manage thatch accumulation, and following core re-incorporation, create seedbed at the surface in preparation for overseeding.

Too often tow-behind, drum-type cultivation units are used across dry compacted sports fields with little or no impact on the surface. Albeit more expensive to purchase and maintain, reciprocating tine coring machines powered by a tractor (i.e. attached to the PTO) equipped with 0.75 to 1.0 inch tines positioned on a tight centering pattern are most effective in alleviating compaction and bringing soil to the surface.

Overseeding

During the course of a traffic-intensive sports season, turfgrass cover in goal creases, field centers, and penalty kick areas will inevitably thin. As turf cover begins to decline, it is important to initiate an overseeding program to introduce new plants. All too often sports field managers wait for nearly 100% bare soil to appear prior to introducing seed. While overseeding at this point is better than taking no action, the process should be started prior to severe damage becoming apparent.

Choosing the appropriate seed for an overseeding program is critical. Many seed mixtures are marketed as “sports turf mixtures” leading field managers and purchasing agents to buy these products for use in overseeding. These mixtures typically contain Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue and are better suited for establishment projects where there is ample time to wait for the turf to fully establish before use.

Perennial ryegrass seed blends (i.e. two or more varieties of the same turf species) are the best choice for routine overseeding of high traffic field locations as this species will germinate more readily in cooler soil temperatures compared to Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue, making it an ideal choice for overseeding during the fall and early spring sports seasons.

Fields badly damaged resulting from summer sports can be core cultivated to a 4-inch depth in late summer. Following core re-incorporation using a tow-behind drag, a blend of two-to-five perennial ryegrass varieties can be sown using a slit-seeder operated in two directions at a minimum of 5 lbs seed/1000 ft²

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The Politics of Sports Field Management

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The natural reaction to this type of conflict is ANGER and the anger could take the form of:

- Retaliation
- Us against them
- Negativity
- Poor Attitude
- Defensiveness
- Distrust
- Passive aggressive behavior
- Despair

These feelings are none other than good old fashioned Self Righteous Anger. If you look at this anger closely you might find that it is driven by good old fashioned self centered fear.

Self centered fears include:

- Being made look foolish or be embarrassed.
- Being made to something that you don't want to do.
- Being afraid that it will cost you something.
- Being afraid that you will lose something.
- Being afraid others will be mad at you.
- Being afraid that you will lose your personal power or control.
- Being afraid that you are not enough.

The more you think about it the angrier you could become. You could take it out on somebody, the coach, or a coworker or family member. Or, you might internalize your feelings only to have them come out another way. Have you ever indulged in a supersized portion of self pity or plotted how to get even? These behaviors waste a great deal of personal time and energy.

Ask yourself what could have done first to have avoided the situation? Did you do your part first by:

- Checking a schedule to see if anybody else had a legitimate right to the field?
- Communicate properly to the stakeholders your plan to be on the field?
- Properly request that they stay off the field?

The issue is not what the coach or the team did; the issue is how you handled it and how you will handle it next time. Remember, being the victim is tiresome.

Don Savard is a Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) and Certified Grounds Manager (CGM); Director, Athletic Facilities and Grounds, Salesianum School; and a member of the SFMANJ Board of Directors.



Dr. Henry W. Indyk Graduate Fellowship in Turfgrass Science

As many of you know, the turfgrass industry lost a dear friend and colleague in September 2005. We will all miss Henry very much and would like to insure that his legacy lives on. The Indyk family would like to establish a memorial fellowship to support graduate students interested in applied turfgrass science. This fellowship is being created to help assure that tomorrow's graduate students have the financial resources to get an advanced degree in turfgrass science at Rutgers University. To fund a full graduate assistantship each year in Henry's name, we will need to raise a total of \$400,000. Your generous support at this time will bring us closer to reaching this goal.

To make a tax-deductible contribution today, please send a check payable to the Rutgers University Foundation, 7 College Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08901. Be sure to indicate "Indyk Fellowship, Turfgrass" in the memo portion of your check. If you desire, you may provide a donation in the form of a pledge payable over several years.

*For information on other ways to support this fellowship, please contact
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Crisis Communication Interviews

- Take control early by educating the reporter and correcting misunderstandings.
- Clarify the questions.
- Prepare two to three main messages.
- Give facts: who, what, when, where, but don't give how and why.
- Express your concern. Safety is always the top priority.
- Avoid jargon and do not use humor.
- Frame your answers in the positive.
- Tell how fast you responded, how much has been done and what you will do about it in the future.
- Thank or give appreciation to any assistance.
- Avoid words with negative connotations such as lethal, risky, deaths, maimed, toxic.
- Do not repeat the "charges" or any negatives words, such as no, not, never.
- Be conscious of your body language. Do not place your hands in a "fig leaf" in front or in back of you, but keep your hands/palms open and above the waist. Avoid touching your face, clapping or clenching your hands and pointing your fingers.

Remember these phrases.

You want to give a sense of more to come, which will help to establish your trustworthiness.

"What I can tell you is ..."
 "So far, what we know is ..."
 "So far, what we have done is ..."
 "What we are planning to do next is ..."
 "We will be able to tell you more when ..."
 "I'll be glad to talk with you again after we conduct ..."

Source: Susan Santos, Ph.D., FOCUS GROUP, Medford, MA

Crisis Example and Response

Situation: You have a major event that is being hosted in your stadium the next day. As a set of temporary bleachers is being installed, they collapse and your assistant has been critically injured. A reporter is at the stadium asking what happened and why, and if the event is taking place.

Your first response must show concern for the worker and his family. "Our first concern is for Joe Smith and his family. Joe's safety and the safety of all of our workers is always our top priority. What we do know is that a temporary set of bleachers being installed here at King Stadium collapsed about an hour ago. Joe has been taken to Mercy Hospital."

So far, we have cordoned off the area to protect the public. A team of OSHA inspectors are on their way. We'll cooperate in any way to find out what happened. We have also called in a safety engineer to help. We will be able to tell you more about

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Refining cultural practices to better manage high traffic sports fields

per direction (i.e. total of 10 lbs seed/1000 ft²). Application of a starter fertilizer and maintaining moisture at the soil (i.e. seedbed) surface will increase the probability of successful establishment.

During the sports season, prior to games and practices, perennial ryegrass overseeding can be performed using a rotary spreader and allowing athletes to 'cleat-in' the seed to achieve necessary seed-to-soil contact. In the midst of the sports season, the same rotary spreader can be used to apply seed prior to games and is preferential to repeated use of a slit-seeder as the vertical blades on these machines can potentially injure new seedlings resulting from previous overseeding efforts.

Applying a sufficient quantity of seed is important to achieve overseeding success. A reasonable starting strategy would be to apply 6 lbs seed/1000 ft² between the hash marks of the football field prior to every home game. This area on a standard Canadian football field is 16830 ft² (330 x 51-ft). To apply 6 lbs seed/1000 ft² to this area, it will require two 50-lb bags of seed. If after several games, and potentially other events, turf cover is still diminishing

and new seedlings are not establishing, the seeding 'rate' can be increased to one or more additional 50-lb bags.

Conclusions

At minimum, turfgrass requires mowing, fertilization, and water. Regular mowing with efficient equipment, supplying adequate fertility, and avoiding the temptation to rely simply on the program 'clock' to apply irrigation are basic refinements to primary cultural practices. To maintain turf cover on highly trafficked sports fields, the integration of cultivation and overseeding into existing primary cultural practices will better ensure success.

Reference

Turgeon, A.J. 1999. Turfgrass management. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

Brad Park is Sports Turf Education & Research Coordinator, Rutgers University; member of the SFMANJ Board of Directors since 2003; and Editor, SFMANJ Update newsletter



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The Sports Turf Manager as a **Crisis Communicator**

the accident after OSHA and our safety engineer has evaluated the situation.

Your response to whether or not the event will be held the next day depends upon your management teams' decision. If you are going ahead with it, you need to respond with how you are insuring fan safety: "We are going ahead with the concert tomorrow; however to insure the safety of our rock fans, we will be limiting the seating to the built-in seats in the stadium grandstands and offering on-the-floor seating in the end zone." If you are not going ahead, "We will not be holding the concert tomorrow. Fan safety is paramount and until we know why the bleachers collapsed, we will not be holding any events."

We appreciate the help of the city's emergency response team. I'll be glad to talk with you again when we know more.

Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA), Lawrence, KS



William Mast
Steve Thompson
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Atlantic City Surf Stadium in 2012

piece of equipment made a rut that had to be repaired making sod installation a pain. Using straight sand as a growing medium came from the golf industry and is called a California method. The theory was you could save money without adding organic material or the cost of blending. I have seen method used on golf courses and athletic fields with most opinions siding with the notion that they wish they had used some organics.

After sod, we laid plywood over to the infield. We did a physical soil test for particles and determined that the infield mix was a very sandy material. The test came back with of course heavy sand, light clay and silt for existing infield mix. The city asked about different choices in infield mixes which we reviewed and selected a Marco clay product. The infield mix they choose was 15 to 20% percent clay. Not quite a major league scale but close. As an added amenity we installed 2 zones of irrigation dedicated to just the infield. This irrigates the infield completely in just minutes maximizing efficiently. Some customers have commented that having water on demand like that is better than adding heavy clay infield mixes. The exotic infield mixes with high clay contents have so much additional maintenance involved we have noticed that they prefer irrigation water to seal infields before games. We rototilled blending-in new infield mix, laser graded and topdressed with vitrified clay which is a sister product to the infield mix. It matched colors very well and finished very nice.

The warning track is 24' wide on the outfield side and 15' on the foul lines. It had not been maintained in years, so the first thing we did was strip the top 2 inches of material. We then recycled the material by screening on site. We handpicked large weeds and then screened with a skid steer bucket that was built for rock removal. The process was a great rain day project that we completed in stages. After cleaning we spread the material and picked weeds and trash as needed to groom. After the warning track was finished we built the bullpen mounds (2 on each side) and the pitcher's mound out of Marco mound clay products. The batter's boxes were also constructed with green bricks and the Marco mound clay.

All in all we only worked about 14 days on construction. As soon as we installed sod, the 30 day maintenance began. The contract had a 2-year option on maintenance in which the City contracted with Georgia Golf Construction. We just completed our first year of maintenance and have closed the stadium for the winter. I am writing this article just after the Hurricane Sandy and the second Nor'easter the following week. The stadium field did well. We had to pick shingles that got ripped off. Right before all the rain we aerified and topdressed which served us well. The field drained very well considering the amount of rain we received in a week.

Sean Connell is President, Georgia Golf Construction, Woodbine, NJ; and SFMANJ Treasurer



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