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FOOTBALL FIELD MAINTENANCE FOR NATURAL TURF FIELDS ABOVE THE TRANSITION ZONE: PART 2

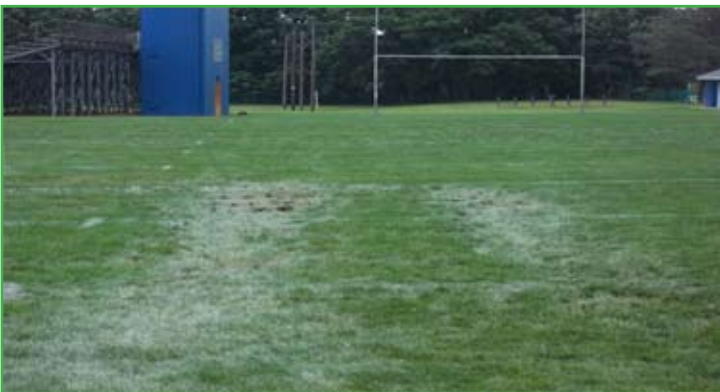
By Rich Watson

With football season in full swing right now, let's look back at how it got started in August. Football season at Overbrook starts around the middle of the month but it actually begins for us around August 1. This is when the fields are laid out. Before the fields are painted we cut in a football pattern consisting of end zones cut in the same direction and every five yards cut in the opposite direction. This is done to burn the pattern in without having to waste paint before field use begins.



Consistent mowing throughout the season is very important. Mowing the same pattern for three months or longer may not be the best thing for the health of your turf. We try to cut a different pattern at least once a week usually before painting with the hope that this will serve as a clean-up cut by keeping the grass blades from laying over and not standing back up. With the pattern burned in, it's time to paint and get ready for practice.

The weather has been pretty unpredictable over the past couple of years. We have had wet weather that causes a lot of damage due to the repetitive nature of football practice. Our coaches do a great job of moving around but sometimes damage is inevitable.



After a wet practice we will sometimes use a light roller to push down damaged turf and broadcast perennial rye seed. This process is used in wet or dry conditions in order to keep up with field damage. Seed is the great equalizer in this equation. It allows us to

keep some turf cover. Summer camp is different from our regular practices during the school year. Practices are longer and are held six days a week for around three weeks. In addition to seeding, managing moisture is probably the key to surviving this time of the season. During warm weather irrigation is run just after practice to help the turf recover and allow plenty of time to dry before the next practice. A wet field can be ruined in a single practice. Monitoring your field during this period is very important. Your practice field is going to be used all year long. If no maintenance is done, it will be a very long and bare season.

Game On: Game prep and repair

It always amazes me how much more energy and time we spend on our game fields. The team spends much more time on the practice field but the game field garners all of the attention. At Overbrook we have a very good situation when it comes to our stadium field. One of the reasons the field holds up as well as it does is the fact that it really is just a football field for games. Our coaching staff has even volunteered to move their Friday practices to the practice field in order to preserve conditions on the game field. The Overbrook marching band has their own practice area at the back of our school that allows them to practice whenever they want. They do however practice on the game field for longer periods of times than I would

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All-Star Game

Continued from page 9

placement on the field, the cleaning of outfield walls in preparation for sponsorship decal placement, and the changing of full wall pads when necessary. Even the drag mats used between innings can be a great opportunity for sponsors to advertise. During the All-Star



Game on Tuesday night, all three base pads were changed every couple of innings or so. This was not done for aesthetics alone. Each base pad had a built-in wireless microphone to pick-up game sounds for the television broadcast. Each time

a pad was changed, so was the microphone and transmitter. Again, these were all new experiences for me.

The warm temperatures may have been the greatest challenge to field operations. Crews had to keep themselves hydrated and in turn had to do the same for the playing surface.

The turfgrass, infield skin and warning track seemed like they couldn't take enough water over the three day period. I was amazed by the irrigation requirements of the entire playing surface. As mentioned earlier, the itineraries of news crews, broadcast network operations and concert rehearsals limited maintenance and irrigation time. On the day of the All-Star Game, temperatures climbed steadily throughout the day and hovered around 100 degrees just before game time. Despite the weather conditions and a tight maintenance schedule, the grounds crew kept the grass green and the infield skin perfectly playable.



The additional challenges of hosting such a world-class event were managed through careful planning and being able to adapt to changing demands throughout the day. The increased man-power seemed to come easily through the helpful nature of industry professionals who volunteered to assist. Grounds managers from other professional ball parks, material suppliers, and Sports Turf Managers Organization of New York (STMONY) members all jumped at the opportunity to help. I'm always impressed by the willingness of our industry partners to help each other. From the MLB All-Star Game to a local Little League Game, we all have a common vested interest in the success of any event played on sports fields. It was a pleasure to work with Bill Deacon (Director of Field Operations at Citi-Field) and Staff who flawlessly managed every aspect of this year's Event. Their professionalism and dedication was an example to all who were part of making the 2013 MLB All-Star a huge success.

Matt Olivi is Sports Turf Manager, Piscataway Board of Education, Piscataway, NJ; and SFMANJ President

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TALL FESCUE Varieties for New Jersey Sports Fields

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Over time, the composition of tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass turf mixtures can gradually shift to a population of primarily Kentucky bluegrass. This is more likely under lower mowing heights, greater nitrogen fertility, more frequent irrigation, and other management practices that favor Kentucky bluegrass. Choosing a seed mixture that minimizes the quantity of Kentucky bluegrass and maintaining the turf to favor tall fescue development should delay this transition.

Perennial ryegrass is often mixed with tall fescue to hasten seedling emergence and turf establishment and provide a darker green turf. Unfortunately, the aggressiveness of perennial ryegrass can result in turf stands consisting of 90% or greater perennial ryegrass when as little as 5% perennial ryegrass (by weight) was included in the seed mixture. Many improved tall fescue varieties have a darker green color; hence, there is less of a need to include perennial ryegrass for color enhancement. Perennial ryegrass can be excluded from a seed mixture when tall fescue is seeded before September 15 and there is adequate time to establish the turf. As a general rule, tall fescue turf will reach a mature condition once it grows through two "cool seasons"; that is, a fall and spring or spring and fall periods.

Tall fescue seedings are typically more successful when seeded at 8 to 10 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet (350 to 440 pounds per acre) of turf area. A tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass mixture should also be seeded at 8 to 10 pounds of seed per 1000 square feet (350 to 440 pounds per acre). Seeding tall fescue at lower rates can be successful under ideal conditions; however, lower seeding

rates have greater risk of forming a clumpy, sparse turf cover, especially when soil preparation is less than ideal.

Emergence of tall fescue should occur within 5 to 7 days when seeded into warm moist soil. The rate of tillering (primary lateral shoots arising from the crown) and establishment of tall fescue is slower than perennial ryegrass but more rapid than Kentucky bluegrass. Tall fescue has a bunch-type growth habit (tillers from a central crown) although short rhizomes are observed on some plants. Extensive tillering and rhizome development are spreading traits that turfgrass breeders are continuing to work on to improve tall fescue varieties.

A well-established, mature tall fescue turf will exhibit good to excellent traffic tolerance. Ideally, intense foot traffic (use) should be withheld for one year on newly seeded tall fescue sports fields to ensure the establishment and development of a traffic tolerant turfgrass stand; however, in some cases, earlier field use may be achievable. Additional details on establishment of sports field surfaces can be found in the Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension Bulletin E300 Turfgrass Establishment Procedures for Sports Fields (<http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=E300>).

Recovery from traffic damage occurs from re-growth of meristems located on the crowns of plants, which are approximately one-third (1/3) of an inch below the soil surface. Recovery is not possible if crowns are destroyed; re-seeding or sodding will be necessary to repair this type of damage.

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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

*Dr. Bruce B. Clarke, Director – Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science
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Run the lines

By Bernard Luongo

When I was a young man many sports seasons ago our household had a subscription to Readers Digest. While there was many a good serious article with excellent content there was also small columns about humor in life. One that always caught my attention was the Humor in Uniform column. Now there is a serious profession with dedicated people, a lot of training, in charge of a lot of territory, and they wear a uniform. Sound familiar? If they can find humor in what they do, what do we have?

Now, don't get the wrong impression, I don't want to turn our newsletter into an Alfred E. Newman Mad Magazine rag. But, I know we have better stuff than that. We as professional Turfmeisters have stories to tell. Heck, it happens several times a day. One that I know we all share and I liken it to the running of the bulls in Spain. It is what I like to call the running of the lines. Whether it's lacrosse in the spring, or field hockey or soccer in the fall, the rallying cry that is heard at the start of every practice throughout the state is RUN THE LINES. Like the bulls in Spain, don't get in their way. They don't stop. Even on the hardwood floor in the winter time. RUN THE LINES. I am beginning to wonder with all the running of the lines that coaches in previous lives must have been fishing captains.

If you are a new Turfmeister and never witnessed this phenomenon of nature you are in for a treat. This event would make any 5th grade

geometry teacher proud. A herd, running in unison, following a parallel line and cutting the most perfect 90-degree angle on a beautiful green plane. Now folks, if that is not geometry, I don't know what is. I am most tempted just to humor myself to prove a point (sometimes explaining to coaches in layman terms the consequences of 'running the lines' just doesn't sink in). So maybe a visual is worth a thousand words.



Sometime this fall, after the players have been running the lines for two weeks, I am going to extend the perimeter line by 50 feet (geometry again), sit back and watch them run the lines. If the experiment goes to plan they will run right off the grid. I wonder if they run out of line if the ones out front will stop and all the others will run into them. It would be quite a sight. I will let you know how it turns out in the next issue. Keep on turfing.

Bernard Luongo is Lead Groundsperson, Northern Burlington County Regional School District, Columbus, NJ, and SFMANJ member.

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FOOTBALL FIELD MAINTENANCE FOR NATURAL TURF FIELDS ABOVE THE TRANSITION ZONE: **PART 2**

like during the competition portion of their season. It does force us to aerate more and keep an extra eye on the area of the field that they practice on over and over again. I guess the best advice is to have a good relationship with your coaches and administrators to make your life easier.

Cooperation is great but you need a good plan going in to the week of a football game. Start by looking at the weather forecast to set up a painting and mowing schedule. Typically we will cut Monday, Wednesday and Friday for a Saturday game with painting reserved for Thursday and Friday. Our cutting height is a little higher than most fields (2.5 to 3.0 inches). We counter that by using a light roller on game day to provide a smooth flat surface. In order to keep our sidelines straight, they are cut a quarter inch shorter that morning before rolling. As the season progresses we begin to broadcast perennial ryegrass seed before our games. This allows the athletes to work the seed in with their cleats. This year we have purchased a Woods seeder that we will use to renovate the center of the field throughout the season. The combination of all of these things is what allows us to provide the best surface possible on a tight budget.



Post-game repairs and rest are what really holds the field together from week to week. In the beginning of the season when it is hot, we will irrigate the field as soon as everyone is off after a game. This helps the recuperation process begin. We may also lightly roll the field to push down any loose turf. This allows that turf to re-root if given enough moisture. In addition, we also remove all loose divots that are not still attached. The divots then are filled with a pre-made divot mix consisting of mushroom compost soil and seed. Sometimes this doesn't happen until Monday depending on manpower and time of the game. However, it is better to get as much repair work done as soon as possible to give the field as much time as possible to recover.

Putting Your Field to Bed

As one season ends another begins. After our last home game of the year, we get ready for the following year. Seeding throughout the season definitely helps this process. Our goal at the end of the year is to fully repair the entire field and have as little bare soil as possible exposed. We start by topdressing all divots and low spots and then seed the entire field with tall fescue seed. Over the past few seasons we have been trying to incorporate more tall fescue into all of our fields because they seem to do a better job resisting disease damage in the summer than perennial ryegrass. The perennial ryegrass serves its purpose during the season by being durable and germinating under difficult circumstances but the addition of the tall fescue gives us more cover going into the season. After the field is topdressed and seeded, we roll one more time and put the final application of ammonium sulfate out. I recommend that you do whatever it takes to keep any type of play off of your field at this time because it is almost at the point of dormancy and any wear will be difficult to repair. A couple of pick-up games can cause a lot of unnecessary damage that will need to be repaired in the spring.

Football in New Jersey is a long season. It starts with heat and humidity and finishes with a mix of cold unpredictable weather. The best way to survive is to have a plan that you can communicate to coaches and administrators in order to provide the best possible playing surface for the athletes to use and enjoy.



Rich Watson is Sports Field Manager, Pine Hill Public Schools, Pine Hill, NJ; and member of the SFMANJ Board of Directors



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TALL FESCUE Varieties for New Jersey Sports Fields

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Maintenance of Tall Fescue for Sports Turf

Mowing heights as low as 1.5 to 2 inches may be used when turf-type tall fescue is maintained with moderate fertilization and irrigation is available. However, tall fescue turfs are more prone to weed invasion at mowing heights less than 2 inches.

Annual nitrogen fertilization rates depend on the soil organic matter content, desired turf quality, need for turfgrass recovery after field use/play, and the age of the turf. Recommended annual nitrogen rates range from 1 to 4 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of turf area. Fertilization of turfgrass in New Jersey must be performed in accordance with the 2011 New Jersey Fertilizer Law (New Jersey Act, P.L. 2010, c. 112 (C.58:10A-64). Four pounds of nitrogen per 1000 square feet per year may be appropriate for establishing turf or promoting turfgrass recovery on intensively trafficked turf sports fields. Older turfgrass stands where soil organic matter content is adequate will require less nitrogen fertilization. The timing of N fertilization for tall fescue fields should be matched with usage. For example, more nitrogen fertilizer should be applied in late summer and early fall if this is also the season of primary use. Conversely, spring applications of N fertilizer should be emphasized when the field use is greatest during the spring. For more information on fertilization of sports fields see Rutgers Cooperative Extension publication FS105 Maintaining Athletic Fields (<http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=fs105>).

Irrigation of tall fescue sports fields is necessary under severe drought conditions to maintain healthy vigorous growth during play. However, a healthy, well-established tall fescue turf needs less frequent irrigation and is capable of surviving drought for many weeks by going dormant. Tall fescue will survive drought conditions best when traffic is withheld while the field is dormant. Insect or disease activity will reduce the survival of drought stressed and dormant turf. Tall fescue turf grown on shallow or unhealthy soil will have a limited root system and, therefore, less persistence under severe drought stress.

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

Dr. James Murphy is Extension Specialist in Turfgrass Management, Rutgers University; and SFMANJ Advisor.



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Things I Wish I Knew Earlier

by Don Savard, CSFM, CGM

Remember how you worked so hard to get your field in great shape during the off-season? You endured the weather extremes and scrounged for tools and resources to get the results you were looking for. Diseases, weeds and insects showed-up, but you nursed the turf back to health each time. No matter what problem you encountered, whether it was machine breakdowns, someone on your crew not showing up for some reason or your boss assigning you an extra project you didn't see coming, you stayed the course. Why you even checked up on the field nights and weekends on your own time just to be sure everything was all right.

You never gave up.

Now, the team has begun their season and they are starting to systematically destroy everything you worked hard to build. Why it seems as though the coaches are having the players wear out parts of the field on purpose, for spite! And to add insult to injury, they are leaving trash around, not even using those new trash cans you provided (Plastic bottles everywhere- no respect!). You feel a range of emotions; anger, frustration and negativity (and maybe some self pity mixed in).

Sound familiar?

I used to dread pre-season because I thought my fields were being abused. I was taking it personally! In our business, we can't let that get us down. A mentor, much wiser than I, took me aside once and explained to me (in simple terms) some essential things I needed to learn.

Field wear and tear is a given.

Sports fields are meant to be used. Our job is to create and maintain safe, playable sports surfaces. Expert sports turf management is all about reacting effectively to field use (and overuse). Traffic from players causes surface wear, such as abrasion to the plant tissues, soil compaction and divoting. Even synthetic surfaces are not immune from wear - infill becomes displaced, fibers break down and seams tear. Fortunately, the science of sports field management is expanding and there are more new tools, techniques and technologies to help us do our jobs better.

The best strategy is a well thought out management plan and good site specific cultural practices. These include proper mowing; a nutrient management plan based on soil test results, soil aeration, irrigation, overseeding (or sodding) with improved turfgrasses and appropriate control methods to manage weeds insect and diseases. If resources are scarce, take pictures and document what is happening to show the owners. This will help to make a case for better tools and materials.

Getting mad doesn't make it better, and can make it worse.

Someone once told me that an expectation is a resentment waiting to happen. Don't expect others to care about your field like you do. A sports field manager carrying resentment



can easily become a target for ridicule and will have a hard time commanding respect and credibility. Don't let that happen. Relax! Take care of yourself. Are you eating right, getting enough exercise and sleep? Make time to recharge and heal the body, mind and spirit. Sometimes the negativity doesn't go away easily. Don't let it eat away at you. Vent! Otherwise you risk taking it out on your family, friends or co-workers. Try to find a trusted advisor, perhaps another sports field manager and talk it out. Damage to your field is going to happen, the question is when. When it does happen, deal with it like a professional.



Pride is one of the seven deadly sins.

It is good to feel good about the work that you do. Taking the feel good to the extreme can be unhealthy. Avoid letting your work define you. You are more than just your job. When your work distracts you from your family and friends it can make you dull. Having other interests keeps your mind sharp. There is more to life than your or my sports field. Yep, it's true. Really!

Unless you paid for it, you don't get to make the rules.

Acceptance of what you have to work with gives you power because you don't have to waste time dwelling on what is wrong (it is what it is). Instead, you can now focus on doing the next right thing. The only thing that you own and control is your personal "brand". Your brand is how your skill set, knowledge and personal style define the overall results that others perceive. Take any two sports field managers, put them on the same site with the identical resources and conditions and you will likely see some differences in the operations and end results. While you might be powerless over certain aspects of the job, you still have control over your brand, quality of work, attitude and finding opportunities for personal growth.

Grass is more forgiving than people.

In spite of your best field management practices, things beyond your control happen. One time, I was informed that my field was going to be used as a parking lot for an event! Whether or not there is rational thinking behind an owner's decision, what will be remembered most, is how well you as the sports field manager dealt with the news. Which response do you think is the best - An outright "Oh hell no!" followed by sulking or "Let me think about it and get back to you- oh yes, we can do this but here are the costs and potential consequences?" Either way, in the end you will have to deal with the aftermath. And the "can do" sports field manager will always come out ahead because he or she makes things happen and give the owners what they want again and again.

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.



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