

UPDATE

March/April, 2008
Vol. 8, No. 2
e-mail: hq@sfmanj.org
www.sfmanj.org

Sports Field
Managers Association of New Jersey



SFMANJ Returns to Shore Regional and Monmouth Park on May 7, 2008

By Brad Park



Despite heavy rains prior to and during the Breeders' Cup, the design and management of the turf course allowed the world's greatest thoroughbred race horses to compete on the turf. English Channel (seen in photo) won the \$3.0 million Breeders' Cup Turf at the Breeders' Cup World Thoroughbred Championship held at Monmouth Park in October 2007.

Following the success of Spring Field Day in April 2006, Sports Field Managers Association (SFMANJ) has decided to re-visit both Shore Regional High School, West Long Branch, NJ and the turf course at Monmouth Park Racetrack, Oceanport, NJ as part of Spring Field Day 2008.

The Field Day will begin at Shore Regional High School and consist of outdoor education focusing on baseball and softball skin surface preparation and vendor-sponsored equipment demonstrations.

As part of Spring Field Day 2008, the field hockey field will be part of the outdoor education. Low mowing heights and a smooth, firm playing surface are attributes that are often demanded by field hockey coaches and players. Attaining these playing surface characteristics on field hockey fields will be part of the education in 2008.

The field day will then move down the street to Monmouth Park Racetrack for lunch followed by a unique tour of the turf course. Coined as *The Shore's Greatest Stretch* the racing facility is the home of the annual Haskell Invitational in August and recently hosted the 2007 Breeders' Cup Thoroughbred World Championships. This event provides the highest paying purses in the sport and attracts the best thoroughbred race horses from across the world.

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The backstretch of the Monmouth Park turf course in March 2005 was poorly drained and riddled with annual bluegrass. Note the presence of a hedge on the inside edge of the turf track.



Following the 2005 Monmouth Park racing season, the inside hedge was removed, topsoil was stripped, and underdrains were installed in the subbase of the backstretch of the Monmouth Park turf course in November 2005 in preparation for the 2006 racing season and the 2007 Breeders' Cup.

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 Sports Turf Managers Association

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This newsletter is the official bi-monthly publication of the Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey.

For information regarding this newsletter, contact:
 SFMANJ at (908) 730-7770 or Brad Park at (732) 932-9711, x127

Editor: Brad Park, Rutgers University
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SFMANJ does not necessarily support the opinions of those reflected in the following articles.

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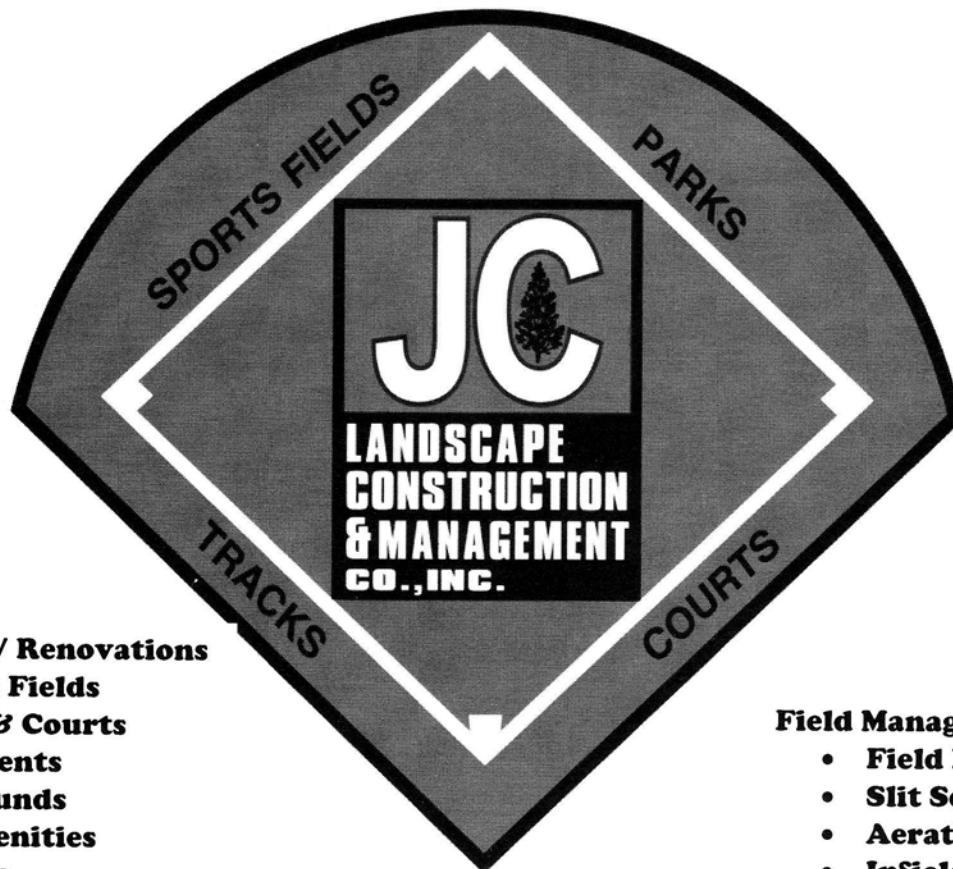
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STMA 2008: AN SFMANJ MEMBER REPORTS ON HIS EXPERIENCE

By Kevin Shipman

I have just returned to the cold northeast from sunny and mild Phoenix, Arizona (I personally like the cold as a nice break from the hot humid weather in the summer). I was attending the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) Annual Conference and Trade Show. This annual conference is the highlight of the Association's year and recognizes its accomplishments as well as the accomplishments of its membership in the previous year. The annual business meeting is held over a lunch and introduces us (the membership) to the Association's new Officers and the new business that STMA is looking to handle in the upcoming year. They provide a financial report on the organization so we can stay abreast of how our membership dues are being spent and how we are aided by being members.

During the STMA conference, there are a multitude of speakers and educational sessions you may attend. The topics range from how to prepare a budget, to managing turf with multiple events, to weed control, to synthetic turf. There are also two days of a trade show that allows the equipment side of the industry to show-off their latest tractors, mowers, seeders, aerators, irrigation, and other supplies. On Friday night, the annual awards banquet lets us see the work of some of the best sports turf managers in the previous year. STMA hands-out awards for the best fields in the high school, college, and professional

levels. They also honor some of the best sports turf managers in the industry with awards named in honor of legendary sports turf managers.

I work at Kingsway High School in Southern New Jersey. It is a Grade 7 through 12 school with about 55 acres of sports fields and 15 acres of common areas around the schools. I have worked in a school setting for the past 7 years and find it very rewarding to do a good job and see that your efforts are noticed. In the school setting everything you perform outside is noticed. If the grass dies, the school administrators and coaches come to see why. If the grass is green, growing well, and the fields are kept-up, the coaches always seem to enjoy the games a little more. The administrators take notice of how the school grounds look and take pride in knowing their school looks good to the tax-paying public. I am even told by non-coaching teachers that the school grounds look nice; that makes me proud of the work that my staff and myself do.

The conference is always educationally rewarding as there are many sessions that are available. This year I focused on attending a few sessions that could provide me with knowledge in areas where I

(continued on page 11)



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For information on other ways to support this fellowship, please contact Dr. Bruce B. Clarke, Director - Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science (732-932-9400, ext. 331; or clarke@aesop.rutgers.edu) or John Pearson, Director of Leadership Gifts at the Foundation, by calling (732) 932-7899 or email: pearson@winants.rutgers.edu

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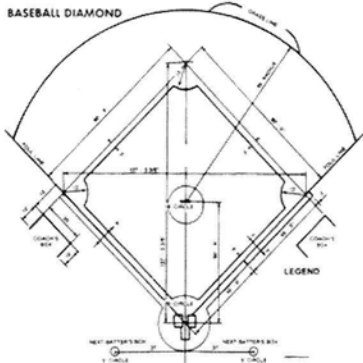
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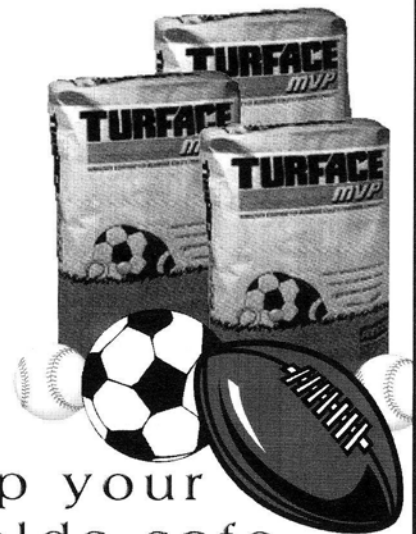
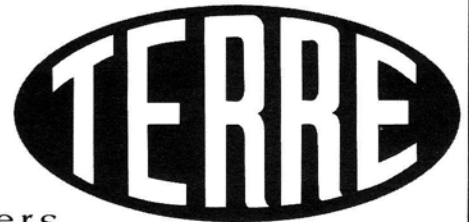
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ORGANIC TURFGRASS MANAGEMENT

By Dr. James Murphy

QUESTION FROM A CONTRACT TURF/LANDSCAPE MANAGER:

A municipality has put out a request for proposal (RFP) to have the municipally owned properties (parks and recreational turf fields) managed 'organically'. There is a bid meeting scheduled for interested bidders. What information would be helpful to know regarding the feasibility and kind of questions to ask the municipality at the bid meeting?

ANSWER:

First and foremost, you need to ask the municipal officials whether the intention of the RFP is integrated crop/pest management (ICM or IPM) that minimizes the use of pesticides or a true 'organic' management philosophy that eliminates use of all synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. Some incorrectly believe that IPM and 'organic' management are the same. Certainly the environmental goal of reducing or eliminating pesticides is commendable; however, it is important to notify everyone involved that the elimination of all synthetic pesticides has consequences that will be considered undesirable by some.

Applying a true organic philosophy to sports field management will NOT be prudent IF the municipality also expects turf/playing conditions to be identical to or better than can be achieved with synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. At this point in time, there simply are NOT enough viable organic pesticides/alternatives available to manage all of the potential pest issues on sports turf fields (which also have to persist under the wear-n-tear of extensive play/sports). Therefore, severe pest and mechanical (traffic) damage on organically managed sports turf will be a matter of WHEN not IF. Considerable hard work and creativity by the grounds staff and an understanding by all users (players, coaches and parents) is essential before an organic approach on sports turf will be viewed as successful within the municipality.

Weeds will probably be the first major issue faced in a true organic management program. Currently, the efficacy and very limited number of organic herbicides available make it virtually impossible to keep out invasive annual and perennial weeds on sports turf (researchers continue looking for more effective organic alternatives but this is a slow process). Annual weeds are particularly problematic as these weeds die each year (hence the name annual) and expose bare soil to the erosive forces of wind and water and the compactive forces of athletic and maintenance equipment traffic, which further degrades soil conditions and the ability to grow healthy turf.

The municipality must recognize that routine renovation (probably one or more per year) will be required for any chance of moderate success of sports turf under 'organic' management. Renovation that involves extensive overseeding (or sodding) in combination with the best implementation of aeration, fertilization, irrigation and mowing practices will be critical for organically managed sports turfs. Moreover, the exact timing and resources needed for renovation work are very difficult to predict since the severity of pest and environmental stress damage varies in both time and space across a facility (property). Thus, the municipality must be prepared to provide or pay for these services in

a timely and on an "as needed" basis. Also it is important that the municipality realize that there is no guarantee that an organic management philosophy will be viewed as successful by all users of the fields.

The organic philosophy for managing crops and livestock has grown in popularity and subsequently become big business in the United States. Interested persons are now seeking to transfer this organic philosophy into areas such as sports turf management. Unfortunately, one major deterrent to developing effective organic practices on sports turf is that there isn't a good analog in nature to use as model. Organic crop and livestock management systems are often based on an evaluation of how these organisms grow and survive in a diverse and naturalized ecosystem to design better management strategies. Finding an appropriate natural analog for sports turfs is very difficult. Sports turfs typically are grown on poorly constructed and highly degraded soils and are often expect to grow under intense traffic (trampling) throughout the year; conditions that are not mimicked in nature. Moreover, there are very few grass species that can be effectively used for sports turfs. More research is needed in the area of 'organic' turf management before sound recommendations can be provided that satisfy all citizens, administrators and users of these fields.

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

SFMANJ Returns to Shore Regional and Monmouth Park on May 7, 2008

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In preparation for the Breeders' Cup event, the turf course was reconstructed in 2005-06 utilizing the expertise of a Rutgers-assembled team consisting of a thoroughbred turf track specialist, irrigation specialists, civil engineers, and agronomists.

In April 2006, attendees at Spring Field Day observed the final rolls of sod installed at Monmouth Park in preparation for the 2006 racing season and ultimately the Breeders' Cup. Spring Field Day 2008 will give attendees the opportunity to see the high quality condition of the turf course two years after reconstruction and learn how the track is being prepared for the upcoming 2008 racing season.

Watch for an upcoming SFMANJ mailing to register for this event.

Brad Park is Sports Turf Res. and Ed. Coord., Rutgers Univ.; SFMANJ Board member; and Editor, SFMANJ Update

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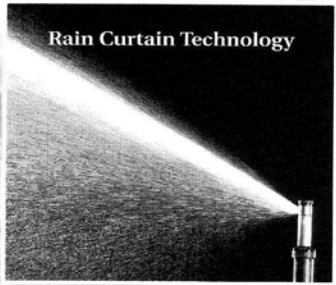
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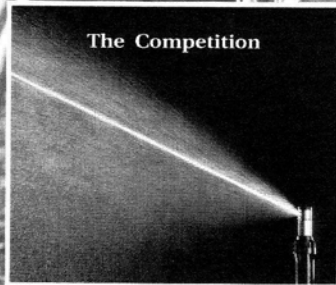


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SFMANJ 2008 Spring Field Day

May 7, 2008

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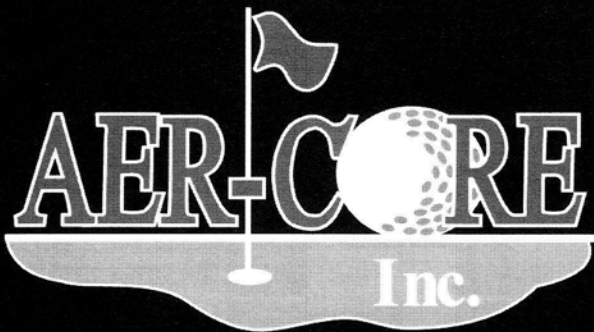
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STMA 2008: AN SFMANJ MEMBER REPORTS ON HIS EXPERIENCE

(continued from page 6)

felt it was needed. The first one I attended related to irrigation scheduling. This is one area where I think a lot of people need education. You can not just set a program on your controller and let it run. I learned to always check my soil moisture levels and air temperature and humidity for a specific region. I also spoke with Don Savard of Salesianum High School in Wilmington, DE. He wrote a very good article a few months back about doing an irrigation audit; I am planning on doing one myself this spring with his help and expertise.

The second session I was looking forward to attending was how to manage a synthetic field. This is such a hot topic now in schools; I wanted to get all the research that I could just in case this ever comes up at my school. All of our fields at Kingsway are natural turfgrass and they are continually getting better. Synthetics are what everyone is talking about these days and I have learned that the more educated you are about these fields, the better you can prepare when the school board wants to install one. You can talk with the board about what you have learned and hopefully with your knowledge you can all work toward achieving a great field.

The last session that I was really looking forward to attending was one focused on managing turf without pesticides. This is probably the biggest topic currently being discussed within schools and many other most segments of the green industry. Many ideas were brought-up on ways to control all kinds of pests with new and innovative ways without

resorting to pesticides. In my state of New Jersey, the use of pesticides in turf - whether it is an application intended for crabgrass control or vegetation control along fence lines - is becoming harder and harder, so new ways need to be examined. This should be the one session everyone at the conference attends. There are more and more pesticide regulations and we all need to do our part in limiting the use of pesticides when we can.

The Kindergarten through 12th Grade (K-12) membership segment of STMA should ideally have the most members and should be the biggest group attending at the annual conference. Most of these individuals have the least amount of training and knowledge. I was included in this group until I started attending the annual conference. We have the most to gain by attending. The education sessions can teach a new sports turf manager many things that professional and collegiate managers already know; however individuals just starting in the industry may not have a high degree of knowledge. Conference attendance could be a great jumping point to much better fields and improved professional abilities. I am hoping that this message can be passed-on to many K-12 districts that are not currently members of STMA; hopefully they will become members. We can all learn from one another and by attending this conference, or any conference, we can help improve the safety and playability of sports fields.

*Kevin Shipman is Sports Turf Manager,
Kingsway High School, Woolwich Township, NJ.*

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Effectively Incorporating Synthetic Turf Fields into Athletic Programs: *A Groundskeeper's Perspective*

By Matt Olivi

As the popularity of both competitive and recreational sports continues to grow in our region, so does the demand for turf playing surfaces that are safe and aesthetically pleasing. As turf managers, we are constantly battling the daily traffic on our natural turf fields. The resulting soil compaction can be devastating with even the most thorough and well-planned turf maintenance programs. Finding the time and resources to maintain our fields between practices and game times for every sport that our facilities cater to is often a difficult task. As synthetic turf fields are rapidly becoming a considerable part of the turf industry, they can be viewed as a great tool for maintaining the playability and beauty of our natural turf fields.

Approximately three years ago, the Piscataway School District, in cooperation with the Piscataway Recreation Department, installed a synthetic field in place of a natural turf field in a heavily trafficked high

school football stadium. As in most cases where a natural turf field is replaced by a synthetic one, there has been and will continue to be healthy debate relating to the safety, cost-effectiveness, environmental impact, maintenance and installation issues of this synthetic field. As turf managers, we are all aware of such debates and may or may not have formulated our own opinions for or against these relatively new fields. This article attempts to offer a positive outlook for proponents of both natural and synthetic turf.

Since the installation of synthetic turf in the Piscataway High School football stadium, there has been a noticeable difference in the appearance and playability of the natural turf fields that make up the majority of the sports field surfaces in the school district. Over the past few years, the natural turf has

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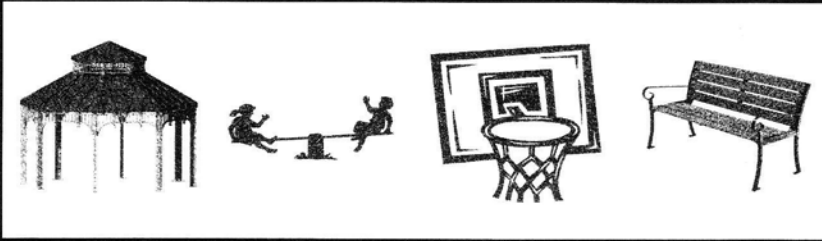
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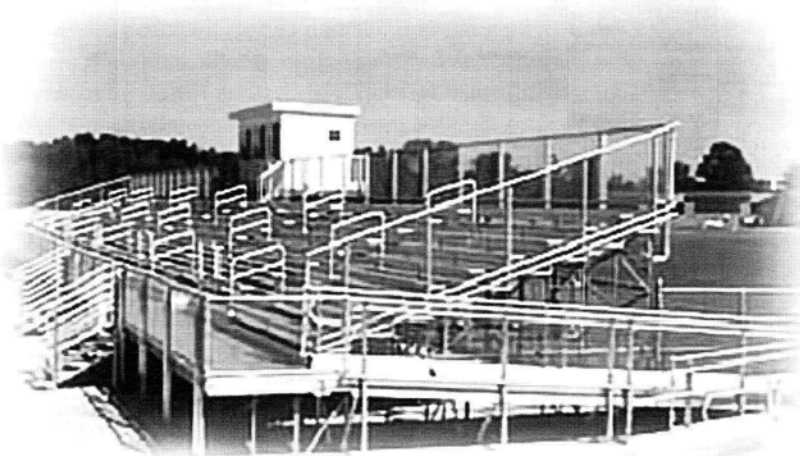
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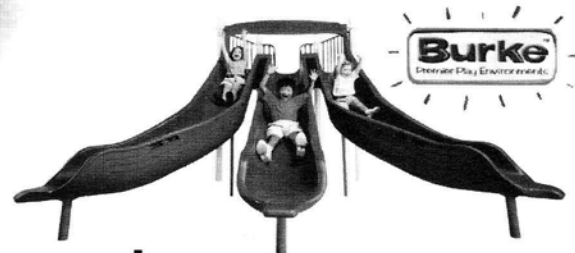
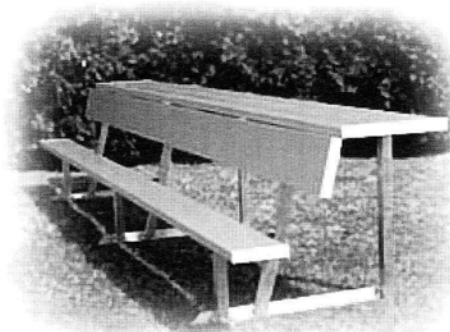


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Writing Technical Specifications for Athletic Fields

By Sean Connell

Well-written technical specifications for an athletic field construction project are necessary for the successful completion of the project. All contracting, both public and private, is based on technical specifications. The specifications are used to qualify contractors, choose specific materials, specify agronomics, establish construction procedures, specify equipment, and set quality standards for the project. The specifications can be used for any and all reasons. Notably, the specifications need to clearly state your instructions so that all bidding contractors and procurement or purchasing officers understand them and that the bid-winning contractor understands what is required to perform the work.

Being a construction contractor who has completed construction projects in 12 states, I have read hundreds of specifications for all kinds of jobs: some good, some bad and some really bad. I have to read and understand all specifications because of financial liability. When I accept and sign a contract, the sole responsibility of that project is mine;

so, it is critical that I completely understand the technical specifications. From my experience, most specifications are written poorly and not thoroughly researched resulting in unaddressed issues. This is where the end user receives incomplete projects or unexpected additional costs. There is the equally unfortunate issue of projects being under-budgeted from the start and owner's rationalization is, "At least we did something." While this is worth noting, the focus of this article is on the authoring of technical specifications.

The process should start with listing all the specifications you have for your project. Considering we are dealing with sports fields, the wording should be industry specific. You will have to integrate purchasing language into the specification to ensure it is enforceable by law. Any public bid has to be advertised publicly with all information disclosed to all potential bidders. This is critical because if all considerations are not met, anybody can challenge the results for the bid. This often results in no project at all or a watered down version of your project. Either way the end result can be negative.

So, we have to write specifications that attract qualified contractors. Ask for a minimum length of time for construction of similar or like projects. Ask for referrals from the clients of these projects and/or contact information to follow-up. Ask for experience with similar products or installation of products. You want to hire a sports turf construction contractor not a site contractor. For example, you do not have a plumber do electrical work so why would you have road builder build an athletic field? I am not saying a road builder can not do the work; I am saying that they have a lot more examples of why you do not want to hire them in the first place (i.e. most high school fields)

(continued on page 15)



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Writing Technical Specifications for Athletic Fields

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in America). If site contractor must be employed, at least have a site contractor mass grade and sports field contractor finish grade and grass the field.

A typical athletic field construction project includes removing or demolishing an existing field, stripping and storing topsoil, rough grading the subgrade, replacing topsoil and adding topsoil as needed, amending topsoil based on soil test results, laser grading the finish grade, soil preparation and grassing. This is just an example of a typical renovation of a field. The first step is identifying what needs to be accomplished and how you want it accomplished - of course, the variations are endless. Now that you have identified what services are needed, you will need to explain in technical terms every item in detail.

Field removal or demolition (demo) will need to have a construction entrance/exit to access the work area. A typical installation has 6 inches of soil removed and replaced with a geotextile woven liner and #4 large gravel placed in entrance to clean-off vehicle tires that leave the construction site. Provisions for the removal of the construction entrance should be detailed. The demo should also list how to remove the existing sod and store onsite for future use. It takes about 6 months to break down the organic matter for use as topsoil. Hauling it away

should be a last option considering we are in the green industry. After completion of demo, the next phase is to remove the existing topsoil and store it onsite. Instructions should include stripping the topsoil without contaminating or mixing it with fill soil. Storage should be provided on the construction site. Other instructions could include screening the topsoil for rocks and/or debris.

Rough grading the subgrade is a critical stage because the soil needs to mirror the finish grade. In most applications of reconstructing existing fields, utilizing the existing soil may be sufficient and is the most economical way reconstructing a field. Utilizing the existing soil and avoiding the import or export any soil will reduce costs. Compaction of fill soils in the subgrade is a standard practice - if fill soils are less than 2 feet, usually the subgrade can be compacted with the equipment doing the work. Remember you are reconstructing an athletic field not building a parking lot; over-compaction of soil will make it difficult to grow grass. Keeping equipment on-the-job increases costs; thus, excluding the use of a smooth drum roller could be considered for cost savings. If there is unsuitable soil because it is soft and it will not compact, this should be taken care of in the subgrade by removing and replacing it with dry, firm soil that compacts.

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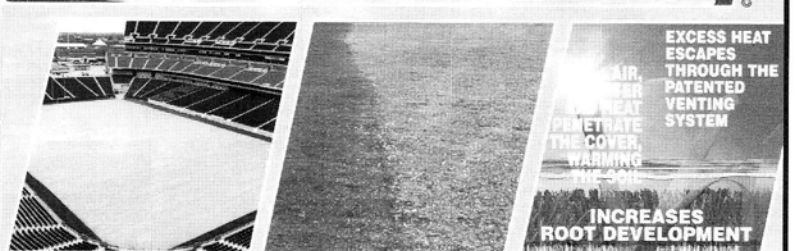
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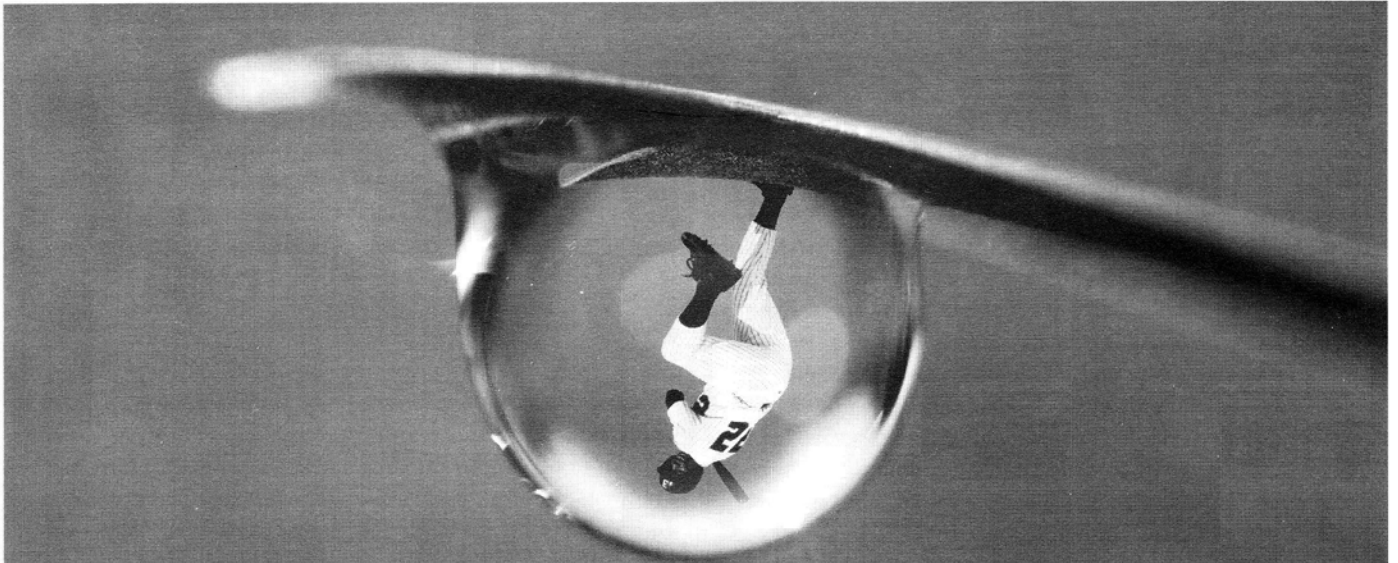
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Effectively Incorporating Synthetic Turf Fields into Athletic Programs:

A Groundskeeper's Perspective

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gradually improved in terms of blade density and soil permeability. The turf has come back thicker and stronger each year as there has been significantly less traffic on these fields. As athletic administration has been urged to limit the use of game fields for team practices and gym class use, the obviously more durable synthetic turf in the football stadium has been able to absorb a great deal of this traffic that used to damage the natural game fields. For example, on an average day, there used to be as many as six gym classes of well over twenty students playing on the natural turf varsity soccer field. As the field was constantly being used all day long, its playability was greatly undermined by mid-season despite the aeration and top-dressing efforts of the grounds crew to alleviate as much soil compaction as possible. Fortunately, as efforts to divert such traffic clearly had positive results, the Piscataway Soccer Club, also sharing the same natural turf fields, recently began using the synthetic field for the majority of its winter season games as well.

As a groundskeeper, it is always more challenging and rewarding to maintain an aesthetically pleasing natural turf field that meets community demands for

playing consistency. As we all know, the communities we serve sometimes overlook the efforts of those managing and maintaining their athletic fields. However, I hear about more and more compliments every season in regards to the improvements of our natural turf fields in Piscataway. In combination with the efforts of an experienced and well-trained grounds crew, utilizing the synthetic turf as a resource for heavy sports field trafficking has produced very positive results.

As turf managers in many different affiliations, we will always have different opinions and arguments in the debate of synthetic vs. natural turf fields. However, I think one thing we will all be able to agree on is the beneficial playability characteristics and the large amount of traffic that synthetic fields can accommodate while still maintaining their pleasing appearance. As the use of sports fields and the corresponding maintenance costs are not likely to decrease in the future, perhaps we can look at synthetic turf as a necessary component of a versatile sports facility.

*Matt Olivi is Sports Turf Manager,
Piscataway Board of Education, Piscataway, NJ;
and a member of the SFMANJ Board of Directors*

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Writing Technical Specifications for Athletic Fields

(continued from page 15)

The soil can also be allowed to dry in-place and then compacted. Last but not least, the surface of the subgrade should be free of rocks and debris down to at least ¾" in size and be finished graded to mirror the finished grade. The topsoil should be spread at uniform thickness from 4" to 6" which does not need compaction from a roller.

Rough grading can be attained with all sorts of equipment but the final grade needs to be completed with machine-controlled laser equipment to ensure the field will drain and perform properly. Use of bulldozers with machine control is appropriate in a mass grading situation, but when you are performing finish grading, a tractor with machine control is required. This guarantees your level of quality – besides, this is the national standard. After grading is complete, quantities of lime and fertilizer determined by prior soil testing can be applied and tilled and mixed in the soil. This satisfies seedbed preparation by loosening the top couple of inches of soil and mixing amendments. Of course it brings more trash, rocks and debris to the surface so be prepared to pick-up and laser grade lightly at least one more time.

At last you are ready to establish turfgrass on your newly graded field. Considerations need to be taken in choosing your new turfgrass. The National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) is always a great resource review all grasses (www.ntep.org). The turfgrass data on this website is generated via nationwide University-based testing. Also,

local references seem to go long way. Noticing what seems to be working successfully "up-the-street" can assist in your decision making. I often read specifications for new field projects that spec turfgrass varieties that were released in the 1950's. We have come a long way since then, so take advantage of the newest information at fingertips. Do your research; it is worth your time and the owner's money.

The realm of technical specifications is a huge, complicated subject that integrates so much information. Navigation of the subject often requires more than one person as it crosses so many topics. Writing technical specifications for athletic fields in public contracting is especially critical because of how the technical specifications are interpreted. However, it can be accomplished. Regardless what is being built, specifications have to be in-place and used to protect all parties involved.

*Sean Connell is Owner and Primary Project Manager,
Georgia Golf Construction, Woodbine, NJ;
and a member of the SFMANJ Board of Directors*

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