

THREE STRIKES YOU'RE OUT!

A LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT survey paints a bleak picture for athletic field managers. But some innovative managers are changing the scene.

by Heide Aungst, managing editor

Lack of community support, low budgets and over-scheduling fields are three strikes against even the best athletic field managers.

"When a field goes bad we receive negatives, but no support," says Bill Dunn, parks and recreation director in Medina, Ohio. "We're expected to have the fields in good shape."

"They just want an area to conduct their events," echoes Bob Marchesano, landscape grounds administrator at California State University in Long Beach.

Most of the field managers in a LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT survey complained about minimal community support. But one had a different story to tell.

"It's excellent," says Harry Gross, parks director in St. Petersburg, Fla. "The leagues assist in renovations."

Gross is responsible for six acres at a softball complex, seven acres at a baseball complex and 21 acres of soccer fields. They are used about 9,300 hours year-round. "There is no off-season in Florida," Gross says.

Reviving renovations

Every five years, Gross and his crew of five for athletic fields (18 overall) completely renovate the Bermudagrass/sand fields. The renovation includes removing the existing turf, regrading the area and

sodding or sprigging. Cost is about \$12,500 to sod; \$7,000 to sprig.

Some respondents never renovated fields. Others renovate only when problems arise. Still others have regular renovation programs.

One respondent, Rod Perry, landscape supervisor at a community college in Marysville, Calif., renovates baseball fields every two years. He spends about \$5,000 to regrade, topdress, reseed and upgrade the drainage systems.

Every five years Perry renovates football fields for \$2,500; softball every two years for \$1,000; and track every five years for \$1,500.

He says his fields are used up to seven days a week, 10 months out of the year. His crew of three spends about 20 hours a week on the fields.

Henry Indyk, Ph.D., of Rutgers University has compiled some of the first statistics on field renovation (see table). A complete field excavation and replacement costs between \$167,000 and \$223,000. Indyk worked with consultants who reconstructed high school fields in New Jersey to get his figures.

Most field managers spend well below \$167,000 for field renovations, when they renovate at all. Indyk says he doesn't have figures for field maintenance.

Maintenance budgets varied

greatly among survey respondents. School budgets often included the surrounding landscape, while park budgets included everything from public cemeteries to roadsides. Respondents said it was difficult to break out figures for chemicals and equipment used solely on athletic fields. But the average annual budget among respondents—including labor, equipment and chemicals—was \$63,991.

Budgets seemed to correlate with community support. When support was low, so was the maintenance budget.

Injuries

Support from coaches and athletic staffs got a mixed review from respondents. Tom Rudberg, grounds supervisor at a college in St. Paul, Minn., says he feels coaches and athletic directors need information to understand the problems and procedures in maintaining and renovating fields.

"I now have the coaches and athletic director justify and budget for major work on athletic areas," Rudberg says. "If they don't like the condition of a field, then they are responsible to correct the problem. I am used as a consultant and estimator. If a project is approved, then I oversee it. If it is not approved, then it is not my problem, but the athletic director's. This makes the athletic department realize the total actual cost of their fields."

Doug Jacobs, superintendent of parks in Sterling, Ill. says his coaches point out areas which may cause injuries to players.

Most respondents agreed that ankle sprains and knee injuries are the most common natural field-related injury.

In order to prevent such injuries, managers perform a variety of cultural practices. "We aerate often in order to eliminate compaction," says Dunn. "Grass is mowed according to sport and weather conditions."

"We try to keep turf areas even and consistent," Marchesano says. "We have been replacing old brass heads with new plastic pop-up rotors."

"We have formal and informal inspections on a scheduled basis as part of the department of safety program," says Walter Stasavich,

superintendent of parks in Greenville, N.C.

A standard?

Respondents varied in their opinions of setting a standard for natural fields. "I would like to have a national non-profit organization (not government), research, develop, and promote standards," Stasavich says.

"I do not believe an effective determiner could be set up which would hold up in court," disagrees Gross.

"Ideally, yes, but it's not practical in our case," says Jack Cook, a high

school grounds foreman in Ferguson, Mo. "We have neither the time nor funds available to correct problems."

"Yes, it would reduce injuries and allow athlete's some consistency (practice fields vs. playing fields)," says Marchesano. "This could be done by possibly an egg drop test or some type of pressure compaction test."

Field management problems may vary between warm-season and cool-season turf areas and depending on the soil type, but most managers face the same challenges.

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FIELD COSTS: NATURAL vs. ARTIFICIAL

by Henry Indyk, Ph.D., Rutgers University

ESTIMATED FIELD COST BASED ON A 20-YEAR LOAN AT 12 PERCENT INTEREST.

Natural:

Principle:	\$250,000
Interest:	\$315,000
Total:	\$565,000
AVERAGE ANNUAL COST:	\$28,250

Synthetic:

Principle:	\$1 million
Interest:	\$1,260,000
Total:	\$2,260,000
AVERAGE ANNUAL COST:	\$113,000

(Editor's note: It's important to note that this is based on a 20-year loan . . . studies prove that artificial surfaces must be replaced after about five years.)

Synthetic field



TOTAL Estimated Cost: \$500,000 to \$1.5 million
This figure does not provide for internal drainage of the field.

Natural field*

*(A PAT system on a natural field costs an estimated \$750,000 to \$900,000)

