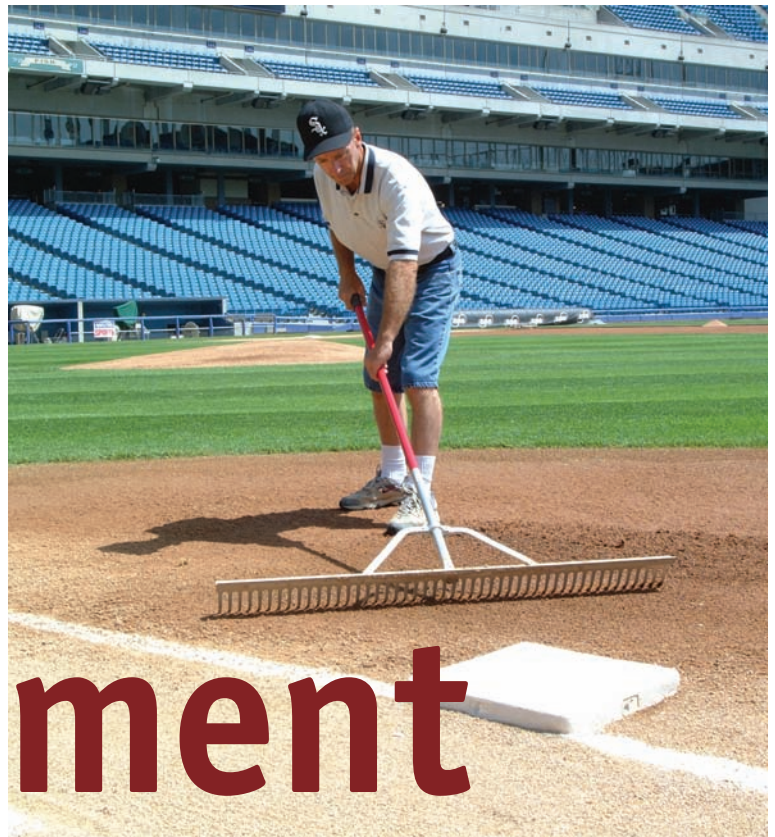


Hands-on training: key to advancement



Head groundskeeper of the Chicago White Sox, Roger Bossard, believes one of the most important issues in the industry is finding good, experienced people. “We don’t do enough to train our groundskeepers,” he said.

It is exceedingly important to understand the dynamics of good groundskeeping practices and continue to develop skills to enhance this time-honored trade. This December he will be hosting a groundskeeping training

event unlike any in the industry. This 3-day intensive workshop will go beyond the basics of field care and delve into problems every groundskeeper and maintenance crew have faced.

“This is truly an education you can’t get in a classroom. There has never been a training program like this in the industry,” added Bossard. The courses will focus on building fields from the ground up, managing daily upkeep (including disease, insects, weeds and seasonal issues), and designing sportsfields.

Participants will work on the Spring Training fields at Tucson Electric Park where the White Sox and Diamondbacks play.

The program gives valuable experience needed by sportsfield professionals at every level of play. Because the training is hands-on, everyone will leave with a real understanding of the work and how technique is crucial. Coaches, athletic directors, team owners and managers can pick up valuable insight into the profession’s best practices.

“I had a minor league owner once say he’d love to spend a day with me, to better understand what his groundskeeping staff does and how he can make decisions that help them work more effectively,” said Bossard. “This is the perfect program for something like that.”

Bossard’s 35 years of experience and family history uniquely qualify him for this kind of extensive, hands-on training institute.

Bossard inherited the spirit of invention from his grandfather, Emil, and father Gene, legends in baseball lore. Roger developed a patented process for installing sand-based fields that speed drainage that is now being used at parks around the league.

As a sportsfield builder, Bossard and his team pioneered the techniques used in retractable dome installations. Because of his specialized knowledge and experience, he is recognized as the premiere sportsfield builder, designing high-profile projects around the world. Other teams around the league often call Roger to consult on their projects, and he’s known for doing



One of Bossard’s most challenging stadium projects was Miller Park in Milwaukee. With over a foot of snow on the field and frozen turf, specially designed heating tents had to be brought in to house the 2-million BTU heaters for 12 days to install the irrigation system and the turf.

“While research data and the science of growing turf is important,” said Bossard, “you have to use it in the context of what makes a good athletic field.” A successful groundskeeper has to be knowledgeable about soil structures, turf growing, and irrigation, but they also have to be able to communicate with the players and deliver what they want.

“I get real satisfaction when I know my field looks great and plays great,” said Bossard. “Of course when an athlete tells you he likes the field, that means a lot too.”

Bossard says construction and renovation projects take a specialized knowledge that not every one has. “Only about half the people who are installing and renovating fields—architects, landscapers, etc.—really grasp how what they do affects a sports field.” The wear and tear, the needs of the players, and the ability to recover between games are all-important factors. “I don’t understand how people can call themselves an athletic field consultant if they’ve never talked to the players, know their needs or even walked on a field,” added Bossard.

Future of industry

According to Bossard, times have really changed over his 35 years in the business. He’s not sure if he were starting off today if he’d choose the same path.

“I’ve been blessed to spend my whole life doing something I like,” reflects Bossard. “Not everyone gets to say that. There are great people in this industry and it just keeps getting better. If there were



Bossard believes to be a valuable part of a baseball organization, you must start with a good education. But nothing beats a real sports field understanding and experience.

one thing I’d like to see change, it would be that the good groundskeepers coming up through the ranks get the opportunities to learn their craft from true sports field experts. I think it is really important that more of the ballpark savvy is learned. It’s just as important as the science. Also that they get the pay and recognition they deserve for being the important part of the sports organizations that they are. As Bill Veeck once said, “A good groundskeeper is worth 10-12 games a year.”

How does a groundskeeper become such a valuable part of their organization? According to Bossard, “A good education is a great start but nothing beats real sports field understanding and experience.”

He counsels, “Always ask questions. Chances are someone’s had the same problem. I hate when young groundskeepers say to me that they didn’t ask me something because they didn’t want me to think they didn’t know what they were doing. Don’t be afraid to call the experts in the industry. We all like to talk about our victories as much as the players.”

“It’s always better to talk to some one in the business,” said Bossard, “you just can’t learn a lot of what goes on out here in a book.” He suggests “rookie” groundskeepers look for internships with A or AA teams.

When asked how he wants to be remembered in this industry, he replied, “As someone who was able to bring professionalism and a certain amount of respect to this job, and as a straight shooter.” He’s been achieving that goal, and a lot more, his whole career.

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These articles was contributed by Oil-Dri, maker of Pro’s Choice sports field products and the Bossard Blend soil conditioner.



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