



COACHES/FIELD MANAGER RELATIONS GUIDE

For almost three years we've passed the mic to groundskeepers through our [Groundskeeper Chat series](#) to get an authentic glimpse into the behind the scenes, of the world's most behind the scenes gigs. Through our efforts, we've had the chance to connect with groundskeepers who are passionate about bringing our industry into the spotlight. While the chats have varied from "how to justify costs and labor" to "how to effectively inspire the next generation" to "how to put your baseball field to bed", there are common themes throughout. 1. This job is ever evolving, gone are the days of being able to hide behind the work, groundskeepers are securing themselves spots as decision makers and our visibility has gained us a seat at the table. 2. In order to succeed at this job, you have to have a love for the science behind it, the community and the culture of sports turf. 3. Communication is the answer for any dilemma you might be having as a groundskeeper. Whether you need more resources to get the job done or you need your user groups to understand why they need to change up their drill patterns, communication is a major part of a groundskeeper's gig.

Our latest guide focuses on the communication and relationship between field managers and coaches. This time around, we not only asked groundskeepers for their advice on the topic but we asked their coaches to join the conversation so we can all learn from their perspectives as well. For two jobs that may seem to be naturally at odds with one another, trust, respect and communication must lead the way to success. Here's are the takeaways you'll find from our coach/field manager pairs in this guide:

- Day One Game Plan For Communicating
- How To Communicate Logistically as a Coach/Field Manager
- How To Build a Culture of Trust and Camaraderie
- How To Educate User Groups as a Team
- Lastly, words of wisdom from our pairs on how to have successful coaches/field managers relationships

MEET THE EXPERT DUOS

- Arizona State University's Baseball/Softball Head Groundskeeper, Jon Larson and Head Baseball Coach, Willie Bloomquist.
- Vanderbilt University's Director of Sports Turf, Tyler Morris and Head Lacrosse Coach, Beth Hewitt
- Quinlan ISD's Head Groundskeeper Tommy Underwood and Athletic Director and Head Football Coach, Todd Wallace
- Head of Parks for the City of Brewer, Maine, DJ Hart, and Brewer School Department Athletic Director, Dave Utterback

DAY ONE GAME PLAN FOR COMMUNICATING

- Each day is a new opportunity to start on the right foot as a coach/field manager duo. So, whether day one means first day on the new job or today is the day you are deciding to turn things around with your counterpart, **establishing common ground is a great first step**. Common ground can mean different things for different organizations but if you're struggling to find something that makes sense for both parties, safety and playability is something everyone can agree on. Sharing the common goal of keeping players safe can answer a lot of the questions or problems before they even arise.
- **Vanderbilt duo, Tyler Morris and Beth Hewitt** shared with us how their introductions happened when Tyler started his position with Vanderbilt last year as director of sports turf. In his first weeks on the job, Tyler made it a priority to have a meeting with each coaching staff to **ask them what worked in the past or what changes they'd like to see his program make in the future**. This gave Tyler the background he needed but also helped each coach feel like they were helping Tyler build the picture for the future. Additionally, Beth credited Tyler for **explaining the why**. "On day one Tyler was committed to explaining the why, or the reasoning behind each of his requests. It was really easy to buy into Tyler's ideas because he was not only seeking to understand but he was willing to educate each of us on the complexity of turfgrass and how we can create better fields together."
- **Quinlan ISD's Tommy Underwood and Todd Wallace** said a great way to turn around a relationship that is headed south is to **put yourself in the other person's shoes**. "Since we're in a smaller district we really gain an appreciation for what each professional is up against because we've probably had to do the task ourselves at some point. Being able to put myself in their shoes gives me an appreciation for what they're juggling, that's the first obstacle to overcome in a coach/field manager relationship."

THE LOGISTICS OF COMMUNICATING

- Both coaches and field managers can agree that with players, parents, maintenance schedules, weather and the inevitable unknown, things can get lost in the juggling of all that chaos. That's why **establishing a clear line or plan for communication with your coach is vitally important to your program**. As a team, the two of you should decide on a meeting schedule for during the season and off-season. How often would you like to touch base during the season? Would it be possible to meet quarterly with the entire staff to discuss big picture goals? What planning can be conducted before the season to ensure we're putting our best foot forward as an organization?
- **Arizona State University head baseball coach Willie Bloomquist gives head groundskeeper Jon Larson** a daily practice plan in advance. This allows Jon to know what areas of the field to focus on before players take the field. Or it opens the conversation for Jon and Willie to discuss an alternate plan in the case that the field won't be able to accommodate Willie's practice plan.
- Most of our coach/field manager pairs agreed that during the season they're communicating on a daily basis, sometimes multiple times a day. This can be happening via text, email or face to face on the field before game time. For **Vanderbilt's Tyler Morris and Beth Hewitt**, they establish an in-season point person for the lacrosse team to help combat the need for Tyler to say the same thing to multiple people and to avoid there being too many cooks in the kitchen. So, in-season Tyler will make daily decisions with one person on the staff and that point person will communicate everything back to the entire coaching staff and players. Since Tyler works with each coaching staff at the D1 university, this strategy helps him ensure he's communicating effectively with each sport/coaching staff.
- Lastly, communication becomes really important when information needs to get out to your user groups. **Brewer Maine duo, Dave Utterback and DJ Hart credited their use of social media to communicate with the community as a streamlined and effective way to provide timely updates**. When weather or field conditions are potentially changing by the minute, Dave said he will use their social media accounts to let parents and community members know about schedule changes or canceled events.

HOW TO BUILD A CULTURE OF TRUST AND CAMARADERIE

- At the core of sports is community, tradition and competition. As a society we've been building a culture around sports for decades. Those community, tradition and competition elements can be utilized to build a culture for your coach/field manager relationships as well. For **Arizona State University baseball duo, Jon and Willie**, the desire to bring home a title for the program is something shared by both. This creates camaraderie among the grounds crew and baseball team as they view themselves as a team opposed to a customer/client dynamic. Their program is built around the philosophy that "every day is a fun day at the ballpark." When things get tough or they're battling tarps pulls, they remind themselves that at the end of the day, it's still a good day to be doing their jobs.
- **Tommy Underwood and Todd Wallace** have established trust and camaraderie over the course of 10 years at Quinlan ISD. However, the pair said they prioritize that weekly coffee and ensuring they're philosophically on the same page, season after season. **Tough decisions become easier when you are aligned with the same goal in mind.** At Quinlan, there is a strict policy in regards to the use of their game day field. Both Tommy and Todd ensure that community members and players remain off the field until Friday night as a unit.
- From our coaches POV, a field manager earns their respect when they witness how hard they work to pull things off despite the constant challenges in their way. **Beth Hewitt, head lacrosse coach at Vanderbilt** said, "when you constantly see your groundskeeper going the extra mile, trust comes naturally. I trust when Tyler says something can't be done or needs to be changed because I know he has already exhausted all his options at that point and I know he has the program's best interest in mind."
- Another component of creating a culture of trust and camaraderie is respecting professionals in their own fields. Our coaches/field managers said that respect must serve as a guide post any time there is a tough conversation that needs to be had. **Respect that each person comes to the table with knowledge and skill sets different from your own.**

HOW TO EDUCATE USER GROUPS AS A TEAM

- Combatting misconceptions for a field manager can become a full-time job, making it even more important to enlist your coaches to help educate user groups.
- **Dave Utterback at Brewer High School** said as an athletic director he acts as the coach of coaches. Which means it's his responsibility to translate DJ's requests as the field manager to his coaches and explain the reasoning behind them.
- At **Arizona State University, Willie Bloomquist** ensures that his players understand the cause and effect of their actions. They witness some of the work the grounds crew does to pull off a great field, but it's the responsibility of the coach to fill in the missing links to give players and user groups an idea of that big picture.
- If you're struggling to have your coach take the lead on educating his players, consider creating a quick guide to sports turf. Can be as simple as an email explaining the three things your user groups are doing and how that impacts the entire organization. Or signage in dugouts and locker rooms. That initial education could spark the user groups to ask more questions or empower them to take ownership over the field/facility.

ADVICE FROM A FIELD MANAGER'S POV

- Always be a yes man until something gives you a legitimate reason to say no. Then your no will hold more merit. - *Tyler Morris*
- Learn from everyone you can, while keeping in mind that you don't know it all. When all else fails, lead with the passion you have for this job and industry and allow that to speak for itself. - *Tommy Underwood*.
- Coaches and user groups will respect your decision if you take the approach of safety and playability. Additionally, it's easy to garner respect when they see our dedication to making things happen when conditions are fixable. - *DJ Hart*

ADVICE FROM A COACHES POV

- Slow down. What you do is important but take the time to recognize and appreciate other experts in their fields. When a problem arises, work toward an answer together. Create camaraderie by building the program up as a team. - *Beth Hewitt*
- As a coach it's your responsibility to educate yourself on why certain things need to happen in order to create playable fields and keep your players safe. Go to your field manager with the intention of learning and respect the expert in their field. - *Todd Wallace*
- Hold your players accountable for not only their actions on the field but how they respect the facility. When you hold your players responsible for their own trash or mess in the dugouts, you make a field manager's job a lot easier. - *Willie Bloomquist*

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