

## DR. MICAH WOODS



Dr. Micah Woods, Asian Turfgrass Center

This month in “The *SportsTurf* Interview,” we meet Dr. Micah Woods, Chief Scientist of the Asian Turfgrass Center and co-author of the Global Soil Survey that informs the Minimum Level of Sustainable Nutrition efforts with Pace Turf’s Dr. Larry Stowell. Woods travels the world and writes an interesting blog about those travels you can find at [www.asianturfgrass.com](http://www.asianturfgrass.com).

**SportsTurf:** How did your interest in turfgrass begin?

**WOODS:** I grew up in the Willamette Valley of Oregon and always enjoyed gardening. I was also a keen golfer, but by the time I graduated from high school I realized I wasn’t good enough to make a career out of playing golf. The summer after high school I was caddying at Waverley Country Club in Portland, heard that there was a job opening on the

grounds crew, and I got that job. I’d never thought of it before, but within a week of starting that job, I realized that this was a perfect combination for me. Getting to prepare surfaces for play and work outdoors, it was just a really enjoyable job. As I worked there for a year I learned more about the career opportunities available in the turfgrass industry. That led me to enroll at Oregon State University the next year to study horticulture.

**ST:** Why did you start the Asian Turfgrass Center? Where does the name come from?

**WOODS:** After graduating from Oregon State University I had worked as a golf course superintendent in China and Japan before going to graduate school at Cornell. During that time working in Asia, I realized that this was a fun and dynamic part of the world, and as far as turfgrass goes, there wasn’t nearly as much research happening in Asia, nor as much provision of regionally specific turfgrass information, as I had seen in the USA. I thought there would be an opportunity to work on developing and then sharing turfgrass information in Asia. When I graduated from Cornell, I did that. I’d wanted to

call it the Asian Turfgrass Institute, but when I applied for that company name in Thailand I found out “institutes” are reserved for the government. So I called it ATC, the Asian Turfgrass Center.

**ST: What research are you doing currently that might affect turf maintenance practices in the future?**

**WOODS:** I'm trying to figure out a way to link the work done to the grass to the growth rate of the grass. I've been studying how much turfgrass grows and things that are related to that growth. For example, dormant turf isn't growing and uses no nutrients. Grass that grows rapidly uses a lot more nutrients. Things like organic matter accumulation in the soil, work required to maintain and improve a surface, these are all related to the rate the grass is growing. I've been studying this and I don't know exactly how it may affect turf maintenance practices, but I think it will somehow, because the growth rate is so fundamental to producing the desired surface for any sport.

**ST: What services you provide to clients?**

**WOODS:** ATC provides turfgrass information of various sorts. Sometimes this is related to grass selection for a project. Sometimes it is about how to adjust maintenance practices to improve surfaces. ATC has also conducted training programs. These services are all related to providing information that can help people have better grass. What I've described is quite broad in scope. To give some specific examples, we've advised on hotel lawns at Hong Kong Disneyland, conducted a multi-year educational program for the Indian Golf Union, worked with Kashima Soccer Stadium in Japan to prepare for the Olympics, and last year we provided testing services to clients in seven countries through our relationship with Brookside Laboratories.

**ST: Is there ever a “regular work week” for you? If so what's it like?**

**WOODS:** No. But if one would take a year's worth of work and then average it out, then it would be something like this. Three days spent traveling, visiting turfgrass sites, meeting turf managers and

**I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO LINK THE WORK DONE TO THE GRASS TO THE GROWTH RATE OF THE GRASS. I'VE BEEN STUDYING HOW MUCH TURFGRASS GROWS AND THINGS THAT ARE RELATED TO THAT GROWTH. FOR EXAMPLE, DORMANT TURF ISN'T GROWING AND USES NO NUTRIENTS. GRASS THAT GROWS RAPIDLY USES A LOT MORE NUTRIENTS.**

////////

contractors and suppliers, and enjoying regional food. Carefully observing the grasses and climate, wherever I am. Half a day spent volunteering at a golf tournament. Half a day preparing to speak at a conference or seminar. Half an hour speaking at a seminar. Half a day writing articles and blog posts. One day reading, doing research, writing scripts in R software to do some type of data analysis. What does that come to? Five and a half days, a little more than that? That sounds about right for what a regular week would be if a year of work were allocated evenly across 52 weeks.

**ST: How do you keep current on turf-related research and best practices?**

**WOODS:** I read a lot. I subscribe to the RSS feeds for a number of websites and see when those sites are updated. I get email table of contents alerts for some relevant journals. I have some alerts set up in Google Scholar for new articles about certain topics, specific grass species, and for new articles by certain people. And I check the programs for a lot of turf conferences (both scientific and trade), even if I'm not attending, to see what the topics are. And people write to me to tell me something, or to ask about a topic, or I may be the one writing or calling to

request information. Those conversations are important.

**ST: What changes in turfgrass management do you foresee in the next decade?**

**WOODS:** I expect there will be a continuing trend to be more efficient in the work, using surface performance data to provide feedback that turf managers will use to adjust the maintenance practices. I've been thinking about turfgrass management in this way. For any location, there is a certain set of conditions one is trying to produce. And whatever conditions end up being produced, it took a quantifiable amount of work to produce them. One can then express the conditions produced, divided by the work performed, as a ratio. A larger ratio is better. One will try to either make the conditions better for the same amount of work, or keep conditions the same while doing less work. What I've just described is simultaneously obvious, abstract, and general, but that's the way I've been thinking about turf management and specifically about how turf managers will be evaluating changes in the work, and making improvements, in the future.

**ST: What are your passions and interests away from work?**

**WOODS:** I enjoy reading and I try to do as much of that as possible, although recently I've been reading a lot for work – science and statistics and programming things. I was a member of the Dickens Fellowship for a number of years and I've read all his novels. I've read a lot of Dostoevsky; in fact I took a Russian class as an undergraduate thinking I might try to read some in the original, but quickly disabused myself of that idea. I enjoy golf, skiing, hiking, and trail running. Last year I did a 38-km trail race in northern Thailand. I'm not especially proficient at any of those but I certainly enjoy them, especially when it's with family or friends. I've traveled a lot, and made friends in a lot of places. I enjoy spending time with them, and they've also introduced me to great food around the world. That's something I enjoy too, having a good meal wherever I happen to be. **/ST/**