

Turf Management Is Ticket To Super Bowl For University of TN Student

Turf®

Tree Services®
Taking Tree Care to New Heights

DesignBuild®

PLOW®

Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

In some ways, University of Tennessee senior Conlan Burbrink has softball to thank for his upcoming trip to the Super Bowl LIV in Miami Gardens, FL and football's biggest event of the year.



Conlan Burbrink, senior at University of Tennessee and 2020 Winner of Toro Super Bowl Sports Turfgrass Training Program

Burbrink, 21, is the 2020 winner of the annual [Toro Super Bowl*](#) Sports Turfgrass Training Program and shared that it was weekends he spent growing up going to his older sister's softball games where he developed his interest in sports fields. "I always loved watching them turn the fields over and all the behind the scenes stuff," says the Turfgrass Science and Management major.

Ahead of the game on Sunday, February 2, 2002, Burbrink will travel to Miami for nine days to work alongside NFL field directors Ed Mangan, George Toma and the Super Bowl grounds crew at Hard Rock Stadium on turfgrass maintenance, logo painting, field preparation for media day, halftime preparation, and field cleanup.

The Cincinnati native admitted he's never been to a professional football game despite growing up with a team nearby. "So, the Super Bowl will be my first professional football game," he laughs.

Instead, he spent summers going to Cincinnati Reds baseball games with his family and liked to get to the stadium early to watch the grounds crew tear down batting practice and set up for the game. "It was fun," he says.

When his sister joined her high school softball team, Burbrink helped his father maintain the team's field as a hobby and eventually a cousin who worked in the turf field encouraged him to look at schools with strong turf management programs.

John Sorochoan, a professor of turfgrass science at the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, told [Knox News](#) that a UT student hadn't been selected for the Toro program since 2003. "I'm very excited for him and the recognition it brings for the University of Tennessee," Sorochoan says.

Burbrink will graduate from the University of Tennessee in the spring and plans to pursue his master's and doctorate degrees to further explore how soil characteristics impact the lower extremities of football players and ball interactions in various other sports.

"I'm interested in how surfaces interact with the ball and the athlete," he says. Burbrink has been involved in research projects analyzing how a soccer ball reacts to both natural and synthetic fields and another that studied how irrigating a field prior to play affect a ball's interaction with a field. Another project has found him analyzing how an athlete interacts with a surface and is a subject he plans to pursue in his graduate work.

"I'm really fascinated by with different sports how the different balls interact with different fields," he says. "There's not a ton of research on how balls interact."

By understanding how balls interact to artificial versus synthetic fields, "you can get the same quality of play no matter what surface you're on," he continues.

"The overall goal is to provide the athletes with the best surfaces possible, and to mitigate most of the injuries related to the playing surface, while

increasing overall safety and enjoyment of the sport,” Burbrink says in an October 2019 Toro news release recognizing him for the company’s award.



Super Bowl LIV will take place February 2, 2020 at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, FL. (Photo: Getty Images)

Apart from his focused studies in turfgrass science and management, Burbrink is also heavily involved at his university and has held several internships, including at the Oval in England during the Cricket World Cup. He’s also had internships with the Orlando City Soccer Club and the Cincinnati Reds Urban Youth Academy. He currently works as a student assistant for softball and soccer at the University of Tennessee. Burbrink also works at the university’s Center for Athletic Safety to research lower extremity injuries.

“He’s really smart in the classroom but he can translate it to real world things,” Sorochan says. “He’s got those intangibles that will make him successful.”

To be considered for the Toro program, entrants had to undergo a comprehensive application process. According to the company, Burbrink was selected from a large pool of candidates due to his interest in pursuing a career in turfgrass science and management, his determination to continue further education related to turfgrass safety for athletes and the impressive involvement he has shown to acquire internships pertaining to his career.

Since 1967, Toro has partnered with the National Football League (NFL) to provide equipment and expertise to help prepare the game field and multiple practice fields leading up to the biggest professional football game of the year. In 2003, Toro and the NFL established the Super Bowl Sports Turfgrass Training Program. Developed to recognize one student each year who has shown exemplary leadership in turfgrass management, the program encourages emerging professionals to further grow their knowledge base by assisting the grounds crew for this high-profile game. **(The student chosen for this Toro program in**

2019 hailed from Auburn University; [read the story from Turf here.](#))

For his part, Burbrink is looking forward to meeting “the best of the best” in the industry while working at the Super Bowl. “I still can’t believe it,” he said.

** Super Bowl is a registered trademark of the NFL.*

Byrnes is a freelance journalist. You can read more of her work at amybyrnes.com.

Read about Conlan Burbrink’s experience at Super Bowl LIV [here...](#)