Cashman Field

Matching Technology With

Las Vegas Stars play ball in the cool of the evening. Fans are treated to Las Vegas' neon horizon between innings. Players enjoy a smooth, firm turf surface.
In the middle of the seventh inning in most major league ball parks, the fans get up to stretch. Usually the organist will play "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" and the fans sing the verse:

Take me out to the ball game
Take me out to the park
Buy me some peanuts and cracker jacks
I don't care if I ever get back
Let me root, root, root for the home team
If they don't win it's a shame
For it's one, two, three strikes you're out

At the ole ball game
That is almost what happened to Gene Stephens. Stephens is the director of facilities for the Cashman Field Center in Las Vegas, Nev. With two strikes on him, some folks were expecting Gene to strike out, but as the old saying goes, "The game is not over until the last strike." Gene instead managed to hit the home run and left the home fans ecstatic.

If you were to visit Las Vegas this year and wanted to see a ball game you would go to Cashman Field. As you enter the complex, it would surprise you that the facility is three years old. It still maintains that immaculate look. As you look across the field, you would never believe that it took three attempts to get it right.

Las Vegas is the gaming capital of the country. Its reputation is worldwide. In the middle of the desert, Las Vegas is truly a plush oasis. The city boasts an enthusiasm for sports.

Major boxing matches originate from here. The city is home for the University of Nevada's basketball team and the Stars, a triple-A farm team of the San Diego Padres.

Cashman Field sits just minutes from the downtown area in a complex that also houses a convention center. The facility opened in 1983 and is the home field for the Stars.

Stephens took the first strike in 1982 when a contractor was awarded the contract to install the playing field. The field was sodded with hybrid bermuda and it wasn't until one week prior to the 1983 season opener that "everyone realized there were elevation problems with the playing field as a result of the field installation by the general contractor," remembered Stephens.

"With the opener just a week away, we really didn't have time to make any corrections." It was decided to go through the season and periodically topdress the low spots hoping they would rise to the right elevation.

Needless to say, the topdressing did not cure the ills and when the season was over, the contractor was called back to do the corrective work.

Those in the business of managing high-traffic turf areas can appreciate what it really takes to produce a fine playing field.
Cashman Relies on Fertigation

Tanks for liquid fertilizer and injectors in underground vault.

Cashman
continued from page 13

field. More importantly, to manage it properly so that it continues to look good and play well. Equally as important we begin to appreciate the skills and knowledge that are required. But like everything else, it takes experience. It should have been obvious that the general contractor who was awarded the contract did not know much about installing sports fields.

When called back to do the corrective work, the contractor brought in more soil, laid it right on top of the hybrid bermuda already there, and resodded the field with a fescue/bluegrass mix that was locally grown.

Those who ran the complex felt pretty good about the appearance of the field after the resodding. But that was in the fall; as they got into spring, the ground crew began to notice spots in the turf. At first they thought that possibly a fungus had developed.

"As the outfield began to develop large spots, we finally identified the problem," Stephens stated. "We realized that the contractor, in doing the corrective work, just put the soil over the bermuda sod. When the field was irrigated and the water percolated down to the level of the original sod, it would send up gases and kill the grass above.

Summer comes early to the desert and by June, Las Vegas reaches high temperatures. In July and August the temperature has been known to climb easily to 115 degrees.

Back in the fall, when the decision was made to use fescue/bluegrass sod, the weather was cooler and maybe the sod made sense. Possibly the contractor felt they would have better luck with this type

Cashman Field grandstand is modern for a minor league team.
of turf. He sold the complex authority on it by stating they would have a year-round grass that would stay green. However, by the time the summer arrived, the field, with its second sod turf, became a disaster all over again.

“We found out later that a fescue/bluegrass field would not survive the heat of the summer,” commented George Goto, a consultant hired by the sports complex. “Especially when we had to keep it cut short.”

The fans who supported the baseball team became more irate as each week passed and the field continued to deteriorate. The players complained. All in all it was a dismal time.

Strike two.

Stephens realized he had to do something. But this time it had to be right. He felt one more disaster and he would have to look for another job. He hired Goto, who had lived in Las Vegas since 1951 and knew the tricks it takes to keep turf healthy there. He has been involved in the horticultural field in the desert for almost 30 years. He exuded confidence.

“I told them if they gave me a free hand and let me do it, I would guarantee the field,” Goto remarked. A budget of $330,000 was allocated to completely redo the field.

Stephens and Goto flew to the Pacific Sod facility in Camarillo, Calif., to look over some fields and try to find out what not to do this time around. Time was running out; no one could afford any more mistakes.

It was finally decided that Cashman Field would have a new playing turf. This time it would be Santa Ana bermudagrass. It would be grown in sand to avoid any contamination. They also specified the sod would come from a recently fumigated field.

continued on page 47
Cashman continued from page 15

Stephens and Goto flew back to Las Vegas. Time too has a way of flying by. Under Goto's supervision the entire field was excavated. A new irrigation system was installed. Drainage was given more attention. Pea gravel was put down and then 18 inches of sand was placed over it. Finally, Canadian peat was incorporated into the top three inches of sand.

By December 1984, Cashman Field was ready to receive the new sod. Truckloads of sod were hauled to Las Vegas from Camarillo and installed under the supervision of Goto.

"When I visited the site and saw the installation, I was very impressed," remarked John Culbertson, director of marketing for Pacific Sod. "The tight seams and closeness of the sod rows to each other was tedious work, but it looked great! They certainly installed the sod right." In one day the first 27,000 square feet of sod was laid. The rest, for a total of 39,000 square feet, was installed the following day. Now the job was complete. Time would tell if Stephens would take a third strike.

One problem remained ... it haunted all those involved over the winter months. Would the Santa Ana come out of dormancy in time for the opener of the 1985 season? Culbertson assured Goto it would. But, in mid-February, Goto began to panic.

"We didn't realize the Santa Ana was still dormant. The seams had not yet knitted together. Nothing seemed to be happening. In desperation we covered the field to force the turf to grow," Goto revealed. "There was an eight degree difference between the turf under the blanket and the exposed turf. That really made a difference."

Goto exclaimed that one could begin to see the grass grow. As February turned into March and March into April, a new season was upon them.

This time Cashman Field was beginning to look like the professional field everyone had envisioned from the beginning, three years before.

On opening day 1985, those same fans who had booed the field last season were treated to a magnificent-looking playing field. SportsTURF magazine visited the field in mid-July. It should be noted that we were duly impressed.

"Since April, we have verticut the field and aerified," stated Goto. "That really made the bermuda pop."

To make the happy ending of the story happen, Goto spent only $270,000 of the allotted $330,000 rebuilding the field. The remaining $60,000 went back into the treasury. Goto is proud of being part of a team effort that sought the challenge. Stephens now has happy fans and a showcase. As for Las Vegas, it has a field that truly measures up to major league standards.