

Countdown to Opening Day: Atlanta Rebounds From Motocross



The Atlanta Braves field team has adjusted maintenance practices to help compensate for an old, inadequate drainage system.

Opening day for Major League Baseball is a national event. On April 8, every Major League team must be ready to compete and have its roster pared down to the best players for the year.

As coaches are busy molding their players into shape at training camps in Florida, Texas, California and Arizona, turf managers at major stadiums across the country are busy getting their turf into condition for the opener.

In Atlanta, the Braves' grounds superintendent Sam Newpher has just four weeks to turn his field, buried under mountains of dirt for Motocross, into a Major League quality baseball field. The job requires full cooperation from the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium Authority and all suppliers.

The stadium, which also hosts the Falcons, the Peach and Freedom Bowls, concerts and Motocross races, was completed in 1965. "The field's original subsurface drainage system hasn't worked very well for years," says Newpher. National television audiences saw the effects of heavy rains

on Atlanta/Fulton County Stadium in 1982 when the Braves were in contention for the Western Division Championship with the Los Angeles Dodgers. "Those games had to be played despite heavy rains," Newpher points out. "We brought in a helicopter to help dry the field for one of the games. It's a credit to Robert Johnson, the person who trained me and still consults for the team, that he was able to keep the field playable with marginal drainage for so many years."

"If you look back, there is no comparison between the way fields were built in 1966 and the way they are today," says Newpher. "The same is true for the majority of natural fields in professional sports stadiums across the country. Prescription Athletic Turf (PAT) wasn't even utilized until 1975."

"Today we have many tools we didn't have just ten years ago. We can totally renovate the field and be ready for an opener in just over four weeks. But, four weeks is all we have, so our new tools have to fit this time frame," Newpher states.

Newpher's schedule leaves little room for

error. After the Falcons wrap up their season, the stadium hosts the Peach Bowl, a college bowl game held each New Year's Eve. Two weeks later the stadium helps kick off the Martin Luther King Celebration with the Freedom Bowl, a two-year-old college bowl game. In mid-February, mountains of dirt are brought in and dumped onto the field for Motocross. By the time the field is cleared and new sod is installed half of March is gone. Newpher has less than four weeks before the Braves play their home opener.

The landscape contractor and the sod producer have to work closely with the Stadium Authority and Newpher to make everything snap into place. Fortunately, when Newpher rose from assistant to head grounds superintendent four years ago, he had two talented suppliers, Gray Contracting and Southern Turf Nurseries.

Gray had been working closely with the stadium since it was built, supplying basepath and mound mixes and topdressing. He is one of the few landscape contractors

continued on page 18

tractors in the Atlanta area who has sports turf expertise. He does the grading for the Motocross and installs the new subsurface each March.

John is the second generation in the family landscape business. His company has also worked with the Fulton County Board of Education on its many high school fields, the University of Georgia with its modified sand rootzone field, Georgia Tech, the Dallas Cowboy Training Center in Irving, TX, and the Atlanta Falcons at their training facility in Suwanee, GA.

The Stadium Authority, Gray and Newpher work closely with Southern Turf Nurs-

eries of Tifton, GA. President and agronomist Tim Bowyer and assistant vice president Turner Gibson assist in planning for the field. This committee came up with the idea of custom growing sod containing both Tifway (419) and perennial ryegrass. This takes the pressure off getting the bermuda out of dormancy by the first week of April. The ryegrass protects the dormant bermuda until the sod knits fully and temperatures rise. In May, Newpher's crew verticuts the field and gradually lowers the cutting height to discourage the remaining ryegrass.

From their experience with a modified sand field at the University of Georgia, Gray and Gibson suggested incorporating sand into the root zone every year. Following

Motocross, the excess dirt is removed from the field and sand is mixed into the top eight inches of soil. The amount of sand ranges from one to four inches depending upon the texture of the soil. The sod is installed and topdressed with more sand. Gibson is careful to use the right sand and tests it before use for size and content.

Newpher is considering deep aeration as a temporary solution to his subsurface problems. He'd like to get the core holes down eight inches into the soil to encourage deeper rooting of the bermudagrass.



The injection pump was installed in less than a day providing Atlanta with new flexibility in fertilization.

Newpher and committee are trying to work out the details and timing for rootzone reconstruction with Atlanta/Fulton County Stadium Manager T. Herman Graves. "Timing will be essential in rebuilding the field with the current schedule," says Gray. Newpher believes that nothing is impossible and is looking for a way to meet the stadium's schedule and rebuild the field with a modified PAT design. One thing is clear, Newpher wants a natural field.

In 1983, Gray and Newpher sighted another tool to improve the playing surface, chemigation. "We'd get the field in top shape for a two-week homestand," says Newpher, "and then, since we couldn't apply granular chemicals for two weeks, we'd watch the field go downhill. With poor drainage we had



Sam Newpher (left) and John Gray during the GCSAA Show in San Francisco.

to be very careful when we watered in granular fertilizers and pesticides."

"I'd only been head grounds superintendent for one year when I went to a turf seminar put on by Mantek. Johnson taught me a great deal during the eight years I was his assistant, but now I was responsible and had to learn as much as possible from other sources. Mantek's Dr. Ed Kajihiro described a system which could inject the needed fertilizer and pesticides through the Stadium's 17-year-old Rain Bird irrigation system. It sounded like a good solution to many different problems, but I was apprehensive."

continued on page 23

Milorganite stands alone

Supplying Nutrients the Way Plants Want Them

MILORGANITE (NATURE'S WAY) VS SYNTHETICS

- No matter how hard scientists have tried, they have failed to match synthetic nitrogen's release with natural growth patterns.
- Granulation does make a difference. Slow and even release by nature's soil bacteria provides Milorganite's nitrogen when and as grass needs it — Never duplicated by chemical fertilizers.

★ THE MILORGANITE EXTRAS ★

SUPPLIES HUMUS: In addition to being the ideal fertilizer, Milorganite also adds large quantities of organic matter (humus) to the soil. Naturally organic Milorganite actually improves the plant growing capabilities of all soils and has been perceived to reduce disease incidence and the build up of harmful thatch.

NO WATERING-IN REQUIRED: Naturally organic Milorganite does not require watering in, so lawns require less water in the heat of summer. Naturally organic Milorganite improves water holding capabilities of most soils for improved drought resistance.

NATURALLY RICH IN IRON AND CANNOT BURN



1926 to 1986

Beautifying America naturally for sixty years

Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District
735 N. Water Street, Milwaukee, WI 53202

When Turner Gibson spoke at the seminar the following year and heard Kajihiro describe chemigation as an important complement to granular chemical applications, he understood Newpher's interest. Together, with great apprehension, Newpher and Gibson decided to go ahead and install the pump and try chemigation. Kajihiro took soil samples, had them analyzed and put

together a program of fertilizers and micronutrients for the Braves.

"Instead of stacks of bagged fertilizer in our storage area, we now have just six 55-gallon drums of prescribed liquid fertilizer," Newpher boasts. The pump and injector was installed in the control room in less than one day with a double back-flow preventer. Newpher's apprehension quickly faded as the benefits of the system became apparent. The whole installation cost less than \$3,000.

"We discovered that the output of our irrigation system was greater than we thought," says Newpher. "We made the adjustment easily and found that all 17 stations distributed the nutrients satisfactorily without any evidence of overapplication. In fact, we were able to reduce irrigation frequency and cycles. Applications that used to take four men half a day could now be accomplished by one person at the controller in 15 minutes.

"We can now fertilize during a two-week homestead or anytime soil tests indicate it's needed. We solved a mid-season cutworm infestation through the system and used it to apply wetting agents twice a month last summer. Furthermore, we have not had a single disease outbreak since we started the chemigation program."

"The most dramatic results are seen with the iron treatment. Within six hours you can see a change in the color of the turf." Kajihiro recommended a 12-4-12 fertilizer with additional applications of ammonium nitrate when needed. "Our only problem has been an unusual, extended rainy period of a week where the fertilizer leached out of the root-zone. When the rain stopped we fed the turf back to acceptable levels."

The fertilizer is absorbed by both the leaf surface and the roots as it leaches into the root zone. "The parts per million applied through the irrigation system virtually eliminates the chance of burning the turf

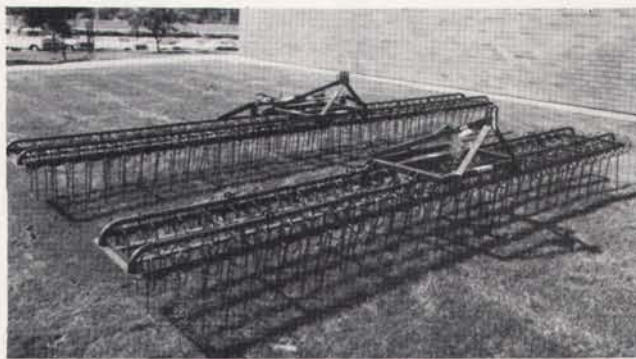
continued on page 24



The field is buried under mountains of dirt for more than a week while the annual Motocross event takes place.

LELY THATCHER

Lely has manufactured the most accepted Turf Broadcaster for many years. Lely now offers the most ideal Fairway Thatching Implement on the market.



Model 450 & 600

Specifications

2-Models
20' Thatcher
10' Thatcher
7' Transport-20'
10' Transport-10'
5 Position Tine Adj.
Up to 12 MPH
Working speed
3 pt. Hitch
Hydraulic Lift-20'

Features

- Thatching grass
- Stands Grass up for better mowing
- Knocks down mounds of dirt
- Improves Fertilizer Penetration
- Ideal over seed after thatching
- 7' Transport on 20' Model (hydraulic)
- Removes Weeds
- Working speed up to 12 mph
- 5 position tine adjustment
- 3 pt. hitch



LELY PACIFIC, INC.

P.O. BOX 961
ALBANY, OREGON 97321
(503) 926-7753

like a granular fertilizer might do on dew covered turf, Newpher states.

"With chemigation I can get the field up to a ten and keep it there," states Newpher. "With granulars I'd get the field to a ten and then watch it fall to a six before being able to make another fertilizer application."

"My original concern was in areas where three irrigation heads threw water. But, my

concern was unfounded since these areas look no different than those reached by a single head."

As baseball season ends, Newpher and the Braves' crew assist the Stadium Authority the turf maintenance tasks for the Falcons. During baseball season the field is cut with a Ransomes 213D, but the Falcons use a pull-behind reel gang during football season.

The Falcons do not want the field aerified as often as the Braves do. Prior to the

Falcons' opener, the field is overseeded with Pennant perennial ryegrass using a cyclone spreader pulled by a turf truckster. We go over the field after seeding with the reel gang so the rollers press the seed down for soil contact. "The finer blade and darker color of Pennant from Sunbelt Seed, a division of STN, is preferable to annual ryegrass," says Newpher.

Newpher uses a motorized sand trap rake to groom the base paths. He is careful not to leave the tarp on the field. "The tarp acts like an oven and bakes the 50:50 clay/sand base path mix into a brick-hard surface. By pulling the tarp up quickly after rains and using the trap rake to cultivate the base paths we cut down on base path maintenance."

"Our field cover is ten-ounce vinyl and usually holds up well for three seasons. It weighs 2,700 lbs. dry, but the wet weight is considerably greater."

Newpher and Gray were quite impressed with the Sports Turf Manager's Association sessions during the recent Golf Course Superintendents Association of America Show in San Francisco. "I've never seen so many experts in one place at one time helping sports turf managers," Newpher exclaims. "But the best part was being able to talk to other major league turf managers. When I returned from the conference I spoke with the Braves' management about encouraging our minor league turf managers to join STMA."



The day after Motocross ends, the mountains of dirt are hauled away and the field is prepared for sodding. Opening day is less than five weeks away.

TERRA—THE VERSATILE ONE



LOW MAINTENANCE

- Stadiums
- Soccer Fields
- Baseball Fields
- Playgrounds
- Polo Fields
- Parks
- Greens
- Fairways
- Tees
- Lawns
- Fringes

ANY TURF AREA — LARGE OR SMALL

CONTACT YOUR TERRA DISTRIBUTOR OR:

Terracare Products Co., Inc.

P.O. BOX 506, PARDEEVILLE, WI 53954

(608) 429-3402

**We've been keeping
Sports Turf Green for 78 Years**

THOMPSON
IRRIGATION EQUIPMENT SINCE 1907



**Seven (7) Good Reasons
to use THOMPSON for
Your Turf Irrigation:**

- SEVEN (7) YEAR UNCONDITIONAL GUARANTEE.
- LESS MAINTENANCE.
- LOWER COSTS.
- VANDAL RESISTANCE.
- SAVES WATER.
- SAVES ENERGY.
- HEAVY DUTY (Brass & Cast Iron)

Are you tired of spending your maintenance dollars and labor on DISPOSABLE plastic sprinklers?

Thompson offers you a REPAIRABLE brass sprinkler with low maintenance and usable life of minimum twenty-five (25) years. Think about it!

THOMPSON MANUFACTURING COMPANY
DIVISION OF JENNISON ENTERPRISES, INC.

4832 Chino Avenue • Post Office 1500
Chino, California 91708 • (714) 591-4851