

CHALKBOARD

TIPS FROM THE PROS

The Right Basepath Mix

The best-looking baseball field strikes out if the basepaths turn to mud after a short rain. The appearance and condition of basepaths can make a big impression, much like the impact a cinder track has on a visiting track team compared to a freshly painted, rubberized asphalt track.

Some of the best-kept secrets of baseball field management involve basepaths. Local topdressing or topsoil suppliers often will not divulge the content of their basepath mixes. Insiders will tell you the best basepaths are a combination of sand and clay on top of a good drainage system.

Forget the mystery; basepath mixes provide that special finishing touch to a baseball field, while keeping it in play longer during rain and then back in play faster after a rain. The last two points are more important to managers of skinned infields.

A good basepath mix absorbs its own weight or more of water without changing texture. It holds this moisture longer than typical native soils, thus reducing problems with dust or powdering. The texture of a mix should permit rapid drainage and firm footing and should cushion the players as they slide. It should be free of stones, and easily worked and smoothed.

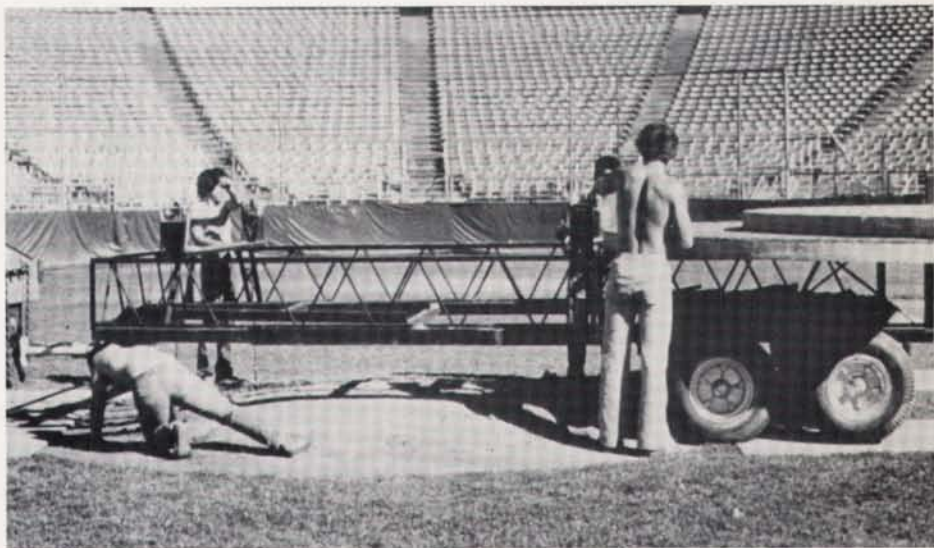
Jim Kelsey, president of Partac Peat Corp., makers of Beam Clay mix, recommends three inches of his mix on basepaths and four to six inches around the bases. This would amount to 120 tons of the sand/clay mix for construction of a regulation grass infield and 180 tons for a skinned infield. Kelsey suggests an additional one-inch maintenance layer in subsequent years. The basepath should be graded and scarified before adding the maintenance layer. He also stresses the need for good drainage underneath.

If you put a pencil to these figures, the initial investment in basepaths for one infield is approximately \$5,000, and \$1,600 in following years. It may sound high, but then figure the cost of a rainout(s).

Bill Wrobel, marketing manager for Turface by International Minerals & Chemical Corp. (IMC), also highlights the importance of drainage beneath the basepaths in regions of moderate to heavy rainfall. Turface, a processed calcined clay, is rototilled into the top four to six inches of existing soil. Initial amendment of an infield, pitcher's mound, and batter's box would require a total of 18 tons of Turface (25% of the soil volume). The paths are then graded and rolled.

Turface is recommended as an underlayment to infield sod and as a topdress-

Denver's Portable Mound



Mile High Stadium crew hooks trailer chains to U-bolts on steel plate underneath the pitcher's mound for removal.

When a field is constantly switched from one sport to another, rebuilding the pitcher's mound can get to be a problem. Steve Wightman, turf manager at Mile High Stadium, has been using a portable mound since 1977. His crew can remove the mound in 15 minutes and install it in 30 minutes. Pitchers like the mound because it's solid and the same for each game.

The trick is a 1/4-inch steel plate buried beneath ten inches of mound mix. Rather than rebuilding the mound for each game, Wightman's homemade trailer lifts the entire mound eight inches and carts it from storage to its place on the field. The 13-foot-diameter steel plate, reinforced by two-inch angle iron, has four strategically placed U-bolts. Chains from the trailer attach to these

bolts for lifting.

The portable mound plate is supported out on the field by a four-inch-thick concrete slab, nestled four inches below field grade. Guide pins are embedded in the slab. When the pins are matched with corresponding slots in the metal plate, the mound is in exactly the right position for each game. The edges of the mound are then dressed and packed.

For football and soccer, the mound is carted away and the four-inch hole over the concrete slab is filled with dirt to be level with the field. Thick sod is laid and topdressed with sand. This is one of the ways Mile High is able to host more than 100 events each year.

ing for wet spots in the outfield. IMC does not encourage the use of Turface in the batter's box since the resulting soil would be too loose for this area. Wrobel suggests using Turface to backfill drainage trenches.

Another approach is to use a drying agent to dry out the basepath mix quickly after a rain. Chuck Lindstrom of Diamond Dry calls his product a natural organic drying agent. "It's not intended to be a major portion of the infield mix," says Lindstrom. "Its job is to dry out a wet field quickly so the game isn't cancelled."

Diamond Dry is spread on top of wet basepaths. "We have turned a quagmire into playable basepaths in less than 45 minutes," says Lindstrom. "At Milwaukee

Stadium, Diamond Dry is used during games to touch up wet spots in a matter of minutes after rains."

The Redbirds, a St. Louis Cardinal minor league club in Springfield, IL, use between 265 and 270 bags (40 lbs. each) of Diamond Dry each year to get them through the spring rainy season. After that, the sand/clay basepath mix doesn't require further amendment says Lindstrom.

"Park superintendents would love to know what major league turf managers do for basepaths. The problem is each guy does his own thing and there aren't any recognized standards. I think we should poll the players on what fields they like best and then find out what those turf managers do."