During March all fields are used in the morning for practice. At least three fields are used each afternoon for games.

A baseball field is the best designed of all outdoor sports facilities. Where players stand, run, slide, dig in or push off, there is dirt that can be raked smooth again. Where the ball hits, there is a smooth, flat grass surface that permits the ball to bounce predictably and to roll quickly with minimal resistance. The majority of the field is covered with turf to prevent muddy or dusty conditions, to provide safe footing, to keep the field cool, and to give it a park-like appearance. The best all-round baseball field is one that is consistent day in and day out.

The consistency of any baseball field is based largely upon maintaining correct distances and angles. It is our job as groundskeepers to check the alignment of the foul lines, bases and mound frequently for accuracy. To do this you'll need a few tools, including four steel pipes, a transit and a pole, a nylon cord 400 feet long, nails to secure the cord, two tape measures 100 feet long, a level, and a carpenter's square. The accuracy of the work is checked by using a level, a tape measure and a carpenter's square. The square is held against a base line and the sight is level to see if it is level. The square is then held against the mounds and bases and the sight is level to see if it is level.
feet long and one tape measure 150 feet long.

Start at the backstop. If the backstop was installed properly, the left side panel should be 90 degrees to the right side panel. Home plate should be located in the center of the backstop. To make sure that it is in the center, a procedure called triangulating is used.

Measure the width of the center panel of the backstop, divide by two and mark the exact middle (point A) of the center panel. From the ends of the center panel, measure along each side panel the same distance and mark points B and C. Run a string from point B to point C and measure the distance between the two points. Divide by two and mark the exact center of the string (point D). A string running from the center of the backstop (point A) to point D should run down the middle of home plate. If the plate is not yet installed, drive one of the four pipes into the ground where the apex (white tip) of the plate will be. This is point E.

To shoot the center of the field, triangulate again. Position the transit so the plumb bob falls just into the pipe at point E (the apex of home plate). Align the transit legs so they won't interfere with measuring tapes or cords. Again, starting from the ends of the center panel of the backstop, measure the same distance along the right and left panels beyond points B and C out past first base and third base. Drive nails in both locations, points F and G. Run a cord between F and G, measure and mark the mid-point which will be point H. Align the transit to point H. Shoot from home plate to the fence in center field. Drive the second pipe into the ground next to the fence to mark the center of the field.

With the center of the field set, the foul lines can be shot. By turning the transit 45 degrees to the left you can shoot the left foul line out to the fence and drive in a third pipe. Finally, turn the transit 90 degrees to the right to shoot the right foul line out to the fence and install a pipe. After you are done, recheck all angles with the transit. Be sure the pipes are flush with the ground.

Run the longest cord from the pipe at home plate to the one next to the center field fence and pull it tight. Check for straightness with the transit. Measure along the cord the appropriate distance from the apex of home plate to the front edge of the pitching rubber and from the apex of home plate to the second base anchor. The cord should intersect both in the center. Make allowances (lengthen) the measurement for second base if the mound is in place. For a regulation baseball field the distance between home plate and the pitching rubber is 60 feet, 6 inches. The distance from home to second (with allowance for the mound) is 127 feet, 33/38 inches. The mound should be ten inches high at the rubber.

Measure from the apex of the plate along the foul lines 90 feet for first and third base. The back of both bases should be exactly at that distance. A quick way to check base alignment without a transit is by measuring two sides of the diamond together. The distance from home plate to second base along the base line should be 180 feet. It should be the same distance along the base line from first to third or from second to home. If it's not, the field is not properly aligned.

Editor's Note: Michael Hebrard assists many schools, parks and colleges with baseball field maintenance for Hobbs & Hopkins, Ltd. of Portland, OR. He is the former head groundskeeper for the Amarillo Gold Sox and summer program coordinator for the Department of Parks in Amarillo, TX.

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