

## Port Charlotte

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ATCs. The drag mats are made of cocoa mat attached to sheets of plywood.

The orange clay and dark green ryegrass were a stark contrast to the white crushed shell used to highlight the warning tracks. He began mowing the fields with a Toro Greensmaster at 3/4-inch in the pattern that had been so impressive in the past. Each day he mows one of four directions. When the teams are out of town, the stadium is mowed on a line from home plate to center field or from third base to first base. The day before home games, he mows on a line from first to second base. On game day he mows on a line from third to second base giving the field a checked pattern. He maintains this pattern while the teams are in town. By mowing in four directions, the turf does not develop a grain and grows upright throughout the year.

The pitchers arrive at spring training first. That week Burns starts lowering the height of cut to 1/2-inch. The following week, when the remainder of the team arrives, the fields are fast and smooth.

In March 1987, the first full month the facility was used, more than 11 inches of rain fell in Port Charlotte. Burns covered the mounds and batter's boxes with individual tarps when the fields were not in use. A single-piece infield tarp was used anytime rain threatened. The crushed shell warn-

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ing tracks didn't need to be covered. "The lift pumps were working almost everyday," states Burns. A supply of pregerminated seed was kept on hand to repair divots in the young ryegrass that spring.

A groundskeeper worries a little when he is keeping two or three fields in shape for one team, but Burns has five teams training on five fields and one infield. Not only were the Texas Rangers practicing there, so were the Class A Charlotte Rangers, The Class A Gastonia Rangers, the double-A Tulsa Drillers and the triple-A Oklahoma City 89ers. During the month of March all fields are used in the morning for practice, and there are usually three games going on at the same time in the afternoon. In 1987, more than 120 games were played on the stadium field alone.

"You have to hustle to get all the fields ready for both practices and games every day," states Burns. The day starts early with mowing, pulling the covers, watering the base paths and setting up the batting cages and pitcher's screens for batting practice. The mounds are covered with artificial turf to protect the clay. Burns has tried covering the fungo area, between home and the mound, with geotextile to protect the turf from grounders. As practice progresses, the crew must be on alert to remove the cages and covers. At least three fields are used each afternoon for games. These fields must be prepared in a matter of minutes between practice and the games at 1:30.

Burns augments his four-man crew in the winter with Brad Richards, Anglea's assistant from Arlington, and Jim Conway, a member of the Cleveland crew who, like Burns six years before, is laid off between football and baseball seasons. "It's great experience for them and a big help to me," remarks Burns. "They free me up so I can keep everything on schedule and talk to the managers about what they need that day." By the beginning of April, the pace slows as only the Charlotte Rangers remain to play through August.

That first year Burns was anxious to get the Tifway II completely established during the spring and summer. Soil tests kept showing a loss in micronutrients. "In 1987, we

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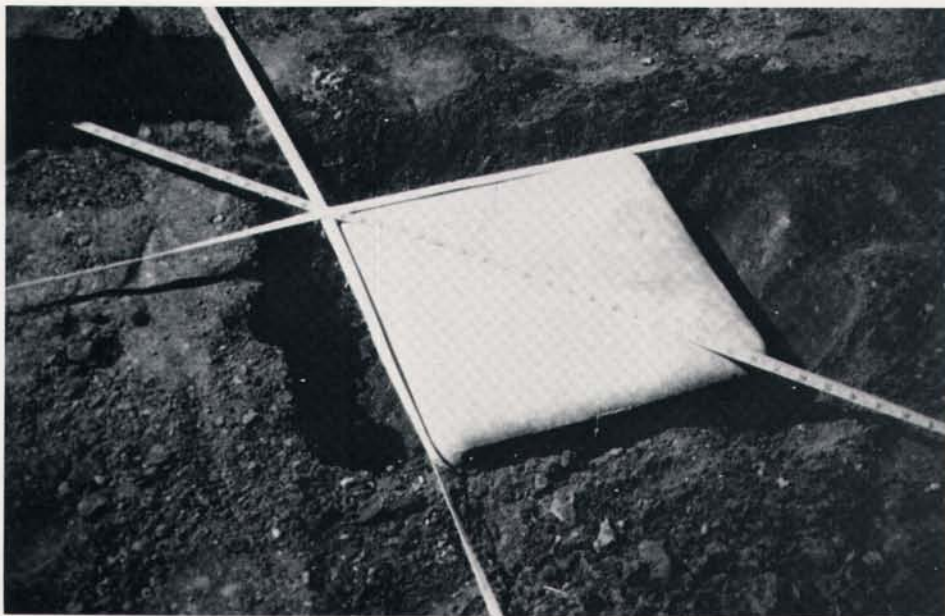
# Baseball Field Alignment

By Mike Hebrard

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

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A perfect fit for third base.

## Alignment

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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



The transit's plumb bob must fall directly over the apex of home plate.

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

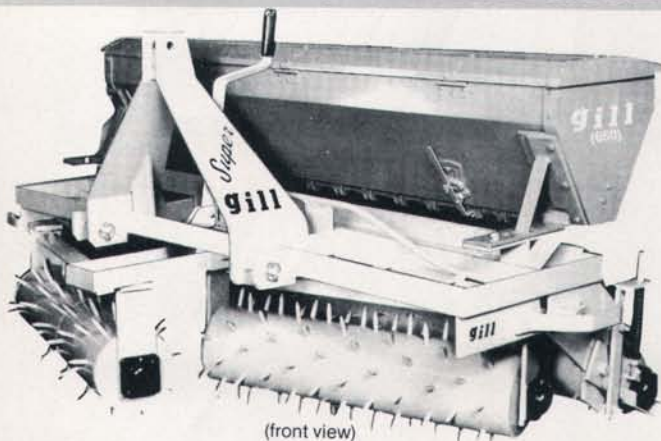
field fence and pull it tight. Check for straightness with the transit. Measure along the cord the appropriate distance from the apex of home plate to the front edge of the pitching rubber and from the apex of home plate to the second base anchor. The cord should intersect both in the center. Make allowances (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, 3 $\frac{3}{8}$  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.

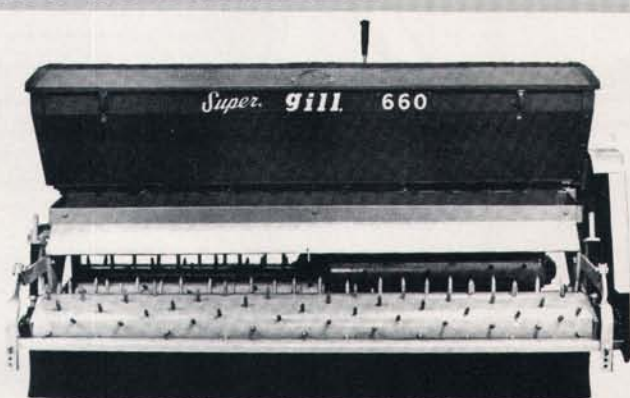
*Editor's Note: Michael Hebrard assists many schools, parks and colleges with baseball field maintenance for Hobbs & Hopkins, Ltd. of Portland, OR. He is the former head groundskeeper for the Amarillo Gold Sox and summer program coordinator for the Department of Parks in Amarillo, TX.*

# Gill

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(front view)



(rear view)

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