

MAINTAINING PITCHER'S MOUNDS

By Jim Kelsey

Maintaining a professional quality pitcher's mound takes more than just sprinkling some clay on the ground, raking it out, and forgetting about it. Properly maintaining a mound is an art, and there are probably as many techniques as there are good groundskeepers.

Here are 11 points that will work for you:

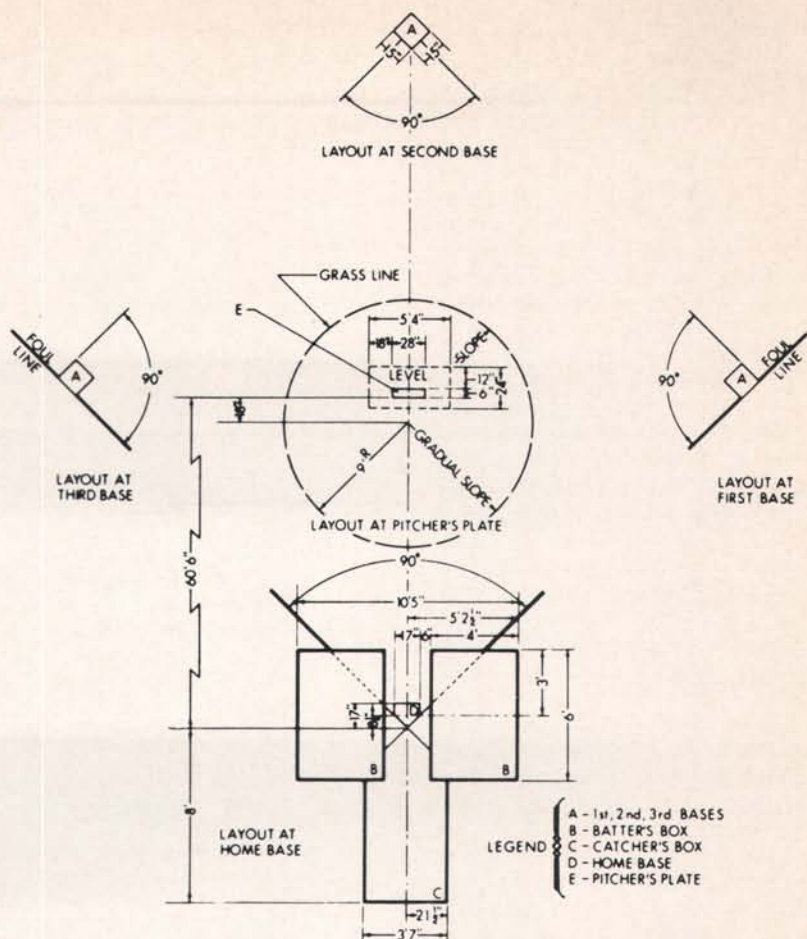
1. If the mound is too soft, recondition it. You can recondition the entire mound, the front triangle, or just the landing area or wear spots around the pitching rubber.

2. Don't use the same material on the mound and infield. What provides a well draining and easily scarified infield won't be firm enough for the mound. Use a firm clay mix.

3. The end result you are working to accomplish is for the entire mound to become one solid, integral unit of compacted clay without any loose layers within it. Otherwise the mound will continue to crack until properly compacted.

4. When conditioning a sandy mound for the first time, remove six inches from the area to be worked to ensure a good base that won't push out from underneath.

5. Create a bonding layer by mixing at



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least 1/2 inch of clay mix into at least the top one inch of old base. If not mixed, the two materials may crack where they interface and the mound will be difficult to compact properly.

6. Wet and compact the clay mix in layers two inches thick on top of the bonding layer until you reach final grade. Use a heavy mound tamper, and slam it down! If you get the mix too wet, just add more dry material. Put a damp cloth over your tamper to prevent sticking, or tamp over a heavy plastic bag.

7. Get the right moisture content by moistening mound material in a wheelbarrow, bucket, or outside pile, so that when a handful is rolled into a ball, you can just barely push your thumb 1/4 inch into the ball. Cleats will be able to grab yet come off cleanly.

8. Scarify the top surface of the mound so that you have 1/4 inch of loose material over the very firm base.

9. For patching, sweep aside dry material, moisten wear spots, and tamp mound mix back in.

10. For a quicker-drying surface, the mound can be covered with 1/4 inch of calcined clay or sandy infield mix. Be careful not to dilute the mound mix when making repairs.

11. Properly locate and contour the mound. The top of the pitcher's mound is exactly ten inches above home plate. The front of the pitching rubber is 60 feet, six inches from the apex (pointed end) of home plate. Drive a stake at the proper distance from home plate in line with second base and mark the correct elevation. This marks the front and top surface of the pitcher's rubber.

The mound is constructed with a nine-foot radius from a point 18 inches in front of the rubber. A flat area around the rubber should extend six inches forward, 18 inches on both sides, and 12 to 24 inches behind the rubber. The mound is *not* cone-shaped with a peak in the center. Instead it has a flat top 64 inches wide and between 24 and 36 inches deep starting 12 inches behind the center of the mound. The slopes behind and to the side of the top are steeper than the slope in front.



Place a plastic bag over the wet clay to prevent it from sticking to the tamper.

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If the base of the mound is the same elevation as home plate, the slope in front of the pitching rubber (allowing a six-inch plateau in front) is one inch per foot. Frequently the base of the mound is higher than home plate to allow for infield drainage. An adjustment in the slope of the mound would then be needed.

Further information on baseball specifications is available from the U. S. Baseball Federation, 2160 Greenwood Ave., Trenton, NJ 08609. The organization sells a booklet called "A Baseball Facility: Its Construction and Care" for \$5.00 plus postage. ☺

Editor's Note: Jim Kelsey is president of Partac Peat Corp., Great Meadows, NJ.

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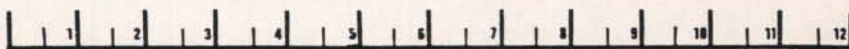
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