

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

EASTERN LEAGUE SETS TRAINING PRECEDENT



Lack of field consistency has been a lingering problem in the minor leagues for years. Before a player can make it to the Majors, he must first hone his skills on tight-budget municipal baseball diamonds in small cities across America. The record he establishes on these fields is what determines whether or not he'll play in the Big Leagues some day.

This baseball boot camp is loaded with pressure, months of living on the road, and tremendous competition. Inconsistent or poor fields can ruin a player's career before it has a chance to develop.

Not only do players have a great deal at stake, so do the owners of these teams, who invest hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to develop the baseball stars of the future. With Minor League expansion set for 1992, one year before the National League adds two more franchises, Eastern League owners have decided it is time to do something about the inconsistency of playing fields. In a recent seven-to-one vote, the owners required that all groundskeepers and general managers in the league attend a two-day field maintenance seminar this September in Harrisburg, PA.

The recent decision is a dream come true for Murray Cook, superintendent of West Palm Beach Stadium in West Palm Beach, FL. Cook, who has a degree in education from North Carolina Wesleyan in Rocky Mount, NC, has been trying for years to create a baseball groundskeepers school. He has worked on baseball diamonds since he was 14 years old and has renovated a number of Eastern League fields in the process. Today he is superintendent at West Palm Beach, the spring training site for the Atlanta Braves and the Montreal Expos, as well as the home stadium for the West Palm Beach Expos and the Tropics.

"The training institute is a feather in the League's cap," boasts Cook. "It has taken a leadership position. Charlie Eschbach [Eastern League president] and Scott Carter [president of the Harrisburg Senators] intend to set an example for the other 18 leagues to follow. Sal Artiaga [president of the National Association of Baseball Leagues] said that if the school works for the Eastern League, he might require the same type of school for the other leagues."

The institute will cover in depth such issues as field specifications, turf renovation, and mound and infield dirt preparation. It will also focus on business issues, including negotiating leases, working with Major League clubs, marketing, and sharing the cost of equipment and supplies. "The seminars will be custom-tailored to fit the needs of all eight teams," Cook promises. When they leave the meeting, all clubs will have their own day-to-day management program, as well as guidelines for achieving it.

During the first year, the institute will be limited to the Eastern League. However, Cook envisions a time in the near future when other leagues, or perhaps colleges and universities, can benefit from the program. "Realistically, minor league clubs can only take advantage of educational programs in their region," Cook admits. "Groundskeepers need information that is appropriate for their part of the country. As a result, training programs in the future will need to be regional in scope."

Golf & SportsTURF salutes the Eastern League and Murray Cook for setting a precedent in training. They are a bright spot in the industry. If you would like to learn more about the Eastern League institute, give Murray a call in Florida at (407) 471-5362. Let his enthusiasm rub off on you so that you, too, can take part in the growth of the sports turf industry.

Bruce P. Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

JULY

29-31 International Lawn, Garden and Power Equipment Expo, Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center, Louisville, KY. Contact: Expo 90, P.O. Box 70465, Louisville, KY 40270, (800) 558-8767.

AUGUST

1 University of Georgia Turfgrass Field Day, Georgia Station, Griffin, GA. Contact: Georgia Turfgrass Association, 4565 S. Berkeley Lake Rd., Norcross, GA 30071, (404) 447-4985.

9 Rutgers Turfgrass Research Field Day, Turfcenter, Ryders Lane, Cook College, New Brunswick, NJ. Contact: Dr. Henry Indyk, Crop Science Dept., Cook College, New Brunswick, NJ 08903, (201) 932-9453.

9 Facilities Management Workshop, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. Contact: PGMS, 10402 Ridgland Rd., Suite 4, Cockeysville, MD 21030, (301) 667-1833.

21 Facilities Management Workshop, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA. Contact: PGMS, 10402 Ridgland Rd., Suite 4, Cockeysville, MD 21030, (301) 667-1833.

SEPTEMBER

4-6 Institute of Groundsmanship Sports Trade Exhibition, East of England Showground, Peterborough, UK. Contact: IOG, 19-23 Church St., Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, UK MK12 5LG; telephone Milton Keynes (0908) 311856.

17-20 44th Northwest Turfgrass Conference, Rippling River Resort, Welches, OR. Contact: Northwest Turfgrass Association, P.O. Box 1367, Olympia, WA 98507, (206) 754-0825.

18 Professional Turfgrass Field Day, Westchester Country Club, Rye, NY. Contact: Metropolitan Golf Course Superintendents Association, P.O. Box 396, Mamaroneck, NY 10543, (203) 329-8257.

18-19 Virginia Tech Turf Research Field Days, Turfgrass Research Center, Blacksburg, VA. Contact: J. R. Hall III, Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, 424 Smyth Hall, Blacksburg, VA 14061, (703) 231-9736.

Send announcements on your events two months in advance to editor, *Golf & SportsTURF*, P.O. Box 8420, Van Nuys, CA 91409. Fax: (818) 781-8517.