



Littick Field (top) and Roy Rike soccer field (right).

Field Maintenance Improves Play at Ohio Wesleyan



The Ohio Wesleyan University men's soccer team has been a contender in the National Collegiate Athletic Association Tournament every year since 1978. After years of minimal maintenance, the Roy Rike Field has finally reached the same level of excellence, hosting the 1990 Division III National Championship games.

According to John A. "Jay" Martin, Ph.D, athletic director for Ohio Wesleyan University, the team has been top-notch since he joined the institution in 1977 as a one-year replacement. "We lost the

championship last year (1990) in penalty kicks."

This and other fields at the university have not always been as "finely tuned" as the teams.

In 1978, after becoming a permanent faculty member, Martin inherited the winning soccer team and six poorly maintained sports fields, including the soccer field. Since then, he has helped the soccer team maintain its high level of performance and initiated improvements on all athletic fields.

In addition to soccer, Ohio Wesleyan also offers a variety of sports that use the athletic fields. These include baseball,

played on Littick field; women's field hockey and lacrosse, which compete on Henry Street Field; and football, played on Selby Field and the football practice field.

"With the exception of the football field," said Martin, "I was personally responsible for maintaining all the fields. My assistant coach and I would buy a bag of fertilizer, throw it on and hope it would work."

He added, "I also watered the fields myself in the summer. They looked terrible those first few years."

Martin indicated the fields were

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receiving minimal maintenance due to a lack of funds, time and manpower. The surfaces were rough, with a mixture of grasses. And the soccer and football practice fields— those used the most received very little care. In 1989, Martin and Ohio Wesleyan turned to Dennis Kasper of the O.M. Scott & Son's company's School/ Sports fields division for help.

"We decided to have Scotts work on our fields because of a test program at Wooster College," said Martin. "We also chose Scotts because of the company's proximity to the university, name recognition and special service program." According to Martin, Roy Rike Field and the Henry Street field received all the attention the first year of service.

All the fields — except for Selby, which has a sand base — are heavy on clay, according to Kasper. He is responsible for most general services on the fields.

"Our maintenance program includes over-seeding, fertilizing, topdressing and insect and weed control," said Kasper. "Service-wise, we core aerify each field. However, we consider soil testing and subsoil crucial to maintenance."

The subsoil decompactor is used to subsoil the fields. Unique, it breaks the compaction of the soil without disturbing the surface. On it are 10-inch blades with "bullets" at the ends. Upon entering the ground, the blades vibrate at high frequencies, shattering the hard pan of the soil while the bullets cut channels which increase drainage. The use of this machine holds moisture lower in the ground and attracts downward movement of the root systems. In addition, the fields are level and softer.

"Topdressing and overseeding are also more effective after subsoiling and core aeration." Scotts Sports Turf Seed and a variety of methylene urea fertilizers, among other products are used at Ohio Wesleyan.

Martin still waters the fields himself and has an outside contractor mow. The fields are cut to a height of three inches once a week in the summer and every three or four days during the school year. In addition, Scotts cares for the infield on Littick Field.

According to Martin, Scotts has solved

major problems on Roy Rike. "The field has been in existence since the 1920's. It needed general maintenance and there were some low areas that had to be fixed."

In addition to the 1990 Division III National Soccer Championships, the field is also used for the Central Ohio High School All Star games, a number of local soccer clubs and summer soccer camps.

"A professional team from Holland is going to work out on it for two weeks in mid-June," Martin added.

The Henry Street women's field hockey/lacrosse field also takes some abuse. "There isn't a practice field for these two sports," said Martin. "So the field gets daily use for two seasons of the year." The university has hopes of adding a practice field for the teams.

Even with all the traffic on Roy Rike and Henry Street, Martin explains that these fields need to be in top condition, "Field hockey and soccer differ from football in that they're played with the ball on the ground. The surface of the field is as important as any other factor in a game. These should be the best two fields on campus.

The teams have high caliber athletes. They play better because the fields are now level and smoother." Martin added that the field hockey team has gone to the National Tournament every year since 1989. In addition to withstanding traffic and play, the fields have also held up well in harsh winters and under heavy rains.

He noted that having the fields maintained by Kasper has also prevented administrative headaches.

I'm not going to ask him to coach my team, so I'm not going to tell him what he has to do to maintain the fields. I don't have to worry about the fields anymore," he added.

As a small university, Ohio Wesleyan

has not allocated a large amount of money to maintain the athletic fields. "That first year, the booster club raised between \$4,500 and \$6000. To get the most out of the money, we put it to use on the sports fields along with some funds from team budgets.

"Our initial budget to refurbish Roy Rike and Henry Street fields was close to \$8,000," said Martin. Ohio Wesleyan's filed maintenance budget has remained within those parameters. Even though they have fewer fields that need "overhauling," more fields now receive general maintenance.

According to Martin, the fields are much better since regular maintenance has become a priority, "Players, coaches and even alums notice that the fields have improved a great deal." The university would like to do more with the fields, funds permitting, Martin indicated.

Martin has been with Ohio Wesleyan's athletic department for 14 years. Currently, he is the chair of the department and the men's varsity soccer coach. He has a doctorate in exercise physiology from Ohio State University.

Ohio Wesleyan University, founded in 1842 by the United Methodist Church, is located in Delaware, Ohio, 20 miles north of Columbus. A 200 acre campus, the liberal arts university has approximately 2,000 students. Notable graduates include Norman Vincent Peale, '20, clergyman and author; Branch Rickey, '04 major league baseball executive; and Jim Berry, '55, syndicated editorial cartoonist. □



Dr. Jay Martin (left) and Dennis Kasper.