

Maintenance, including mowing, is still in the hands of the city, but will be contracted out after construction is completed.



The 40-acre Oso Viejo Community Park complex will be a practice haven for the U.S. Soccer Team until after the 1994 World Cup. All photos courtesy of Jan Frainie, park superintendent, City of Mission Viejo.

Mission Viejo Takes The World Cup Challenge

By Theresa Delia

The men constructing the Oso Viejo Park Lower Tier in Mission Viejo, CA, may not be the biggest soccer fans in the world, but they don't have to be. After the construction of the 1994 World Cup practice fields and training facility for the U.S. Soccer Team is completed, they may have fans of their own.

With the 1994 World Cup held in the United States for the first time since its beginning in the 1920s, choosing the practice field for the U.S. Team was as important as choosing the competition fields. After all, good fields lead to good play. Conversely, poorly constructed fields can lead to injuries.

According to World Cup USA 1994, more than a billion people watched the 1990 World Cup final on television, triple the audience that watched the 1969 landing on the moon. It is the most popular sport in the world and the fastest growing team sport in this country. With that kind of emphasis, The World Cup Organizing Committee will have nothing but the best for their teams.

The Committee had several fields in mind, according to Steve Sampson, vice president of competition, World Cup Organizing Committee. The U.S. team's practice field sites were narrowed to Orlando, Dallas, and Mission Viejo.

"They chose Mission Viejo because it not only had the best facility, but the best climate," says Sampson. "It is also a suburban area with a good living envi-

ronment. Players will be able to bring their families. We were welcomed with open arms by the city council and by the community."

Other activities are also important. Golf courses, swimming facilities, and reduced-rate entertainment are nearby for the athletes. Sampson feels that without these and other attractions, the players will become bored, which may affect their playing.

Tom Levene, a landscape inspector with the city, calls Mission Viejo a "bed-room community—its landscapes have basically put it on the map." The hilly, master-planned, 16-square-mile community has approximately 90,000 residents. There is a high demand for recreational activity in this "well-developed" area, with youth sports being the city's number one priority.

Kelly Doyle, director of parks and community services for the city, says one reason for choosing Mission Viejo had to do with its soccer heritage.

"We have the second largest soccer region in the nation," he boasts. "It came down to this site and the one in Orlando. Mission Viejo was picked because of its moderate climate, its proximity to the ocean and Pasadena, CA [home of the Rose Bowl, site of the World Cup Final]."

The other thing Mission Viejo had on hand to show the Committee were the blueprints for the Oso Viejo Park Lower Tier.

Jan Frainie, park superintendent for the city explains that the city approved a capital improvement project for the 1992-93 budget, which included two baseball diamonds with soccer overlays. The seven-acre complex also included a 3,800-square-foot training facility, complete with a 25-person locker room, showers, weight room, physical therapy room, kitchens, offices, a patio large enough to hold 40 or 50 people, a lobby, a laundry room, and a TV/Media room.

The upper tier of the park has one lighted slow-pitch softball field, a senior major little league field, and two soccer fields.

Sampson explains that the city wanted to keep the new field consistent with the other fields in the complex.

"That was fine with us," he says. "They are in beautiful shape."

Laying The Ground Work

Before the city received the bid for the project, it needed to overcome several obstacles. The blueprints showed baseball fields, for which they already broke ground and installed lighting. The land-

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scape architects literally had to go back to the drawing board.

Keith Rattay, project manager and landscape architect for BSI, explains the U.S. Soccer Team put forth strict guidelines concerning the field and the facility. Two fields had to be constructed, both at least 110-x-75 yards. They needed to be lighted with television viewing in mind.

"The margin of error was very tight," he says. "There was only about five feet of leeway on both sides of the fields. Computers were being used to produce accurate documents. Each point on the field has a coordinate. This was one of the biggest challenges."

A few years earlier, the city took aerial photos of the site for digital coordinates. With the help of an AutoCADD computer-aided drafting program, laying out the new blueprints based on points was easier than off-set dimensioning.

"Problems arise when things are not tied down very clearly," explains Rattay. "Digitizing coordinates and makes things more accurate. Engineering designs are tied to landscape architecture designs."

Levene remembers the difficulty in reworking the logistics.

"We had to provide access for traffic and the handicapped, plus the players themselves," he describes. "We had to negotiate around natural water courses and topography. It was an engineering challenge."

Doyle feels the most difficult aspect was not only redoing the blueprints, but getting them done on time. There was a serious time constraint to have the bid in and ready the course for next year.

"We had about two months to re-do the blueprints and get our bid in on time," he says.

With the new blueprints completed and the bid proposal set, Frainie, Rattay, Doyle, and Levene teamed up with Jim Crosby, superintendent and general contractor with Valley Crest Landscaping, Inc. The city decided to postpone the plans for the baseball diamonds, at least for the next two years. However, the field is constructed with the baseball and soccer overlay in mind.

Field With A Future

The baseball lighting, done by Musco Sports Lighting, remained. Valley Crest began construction in June.

A two-inch silica blend sand base was installed for better root development and drainage. It is also better for the players and the future baseball fields.

The turf is a Tifway-2 hybrid bermudagrass grown by West Coast Turf in Palm Desert, CA. Rattay explains that after the turf matures, topdressing will be applied periodically to build up the sand layer.

The fields are graded one to two percent for drainage. Although there is no below-grade drainage system, there are storm drains and catch basins. The field is irrigated with Rain Bird R-70 rotors.

While the field grows in, Levene will be responsible for the turf development. "Establishment is everything," he asserts.

After the construction, maintenance will be contracted out, but a decision on who that will be has not been made. Whoever it is, Levene says, will treat the field differently for the next two years.

"After it is in, we should have 3-3/4 acres of 'putting green.'"

One problem Levene hopes to avoid is prolonged dormancy or slow "green-up" before play begins.

"If the turf is played on before dormancy is over, it may never recover," Levene explains. "A week of 55-degree weather could put the turf into dormancy."

Levene and Frainie's options for avoiding dormancy include covering the field, applying calcium nitrate bi-monthly, inducing a higher soil temperature. Another option would be dyeing the dormant turf. A darker color would attract solar radiation and heat the soil. Levene would prefer not to do either of those, hoping the turf remains out of dormancy.

"The challenge of any sports turf manager is to enable the turf to recover from an inordinate amount of wear," he says.

The U.S. Soccer Team requested six-foot-high fencing with a shade cloth covering around the field for privacy. There are no seats, but spectators can sit on a slope coming from an upper facility.

The area is wooded with different trees for privacy. Rattay and the others decided on California peppers and cedars, but there are also honey locusts, pine, eucalyptus, and palms. Other drought-tolerant and flowering material is planted around what will be the patio area of the facility.

Construction on the hardscape began in November. Rattay says that because the complex is built in a terraced form, retaining walls will need to be installed. There will also be a lower level parking lot at the lowest level. A road will lead up to the training center and the practice fields behind it. The upper tier is beyond that.

The field is ready for play and the U.S. Soccer has arrived. The training facility is currently under construction and Frainie estimates its completion by May. In two years, after the games are over, it is slated for a conversion into a restroom/concession area, with space for offices.

Reaping The Benefits

Funding for this project comes out of the city's budget. The benefits, however, can hardly be ignored. Doyle estimates construction costs to be about \$2.3 million with an operating cost of about \$75,000 per year. The economic benefits for the city may be anywhere between \$500,000 and \$4 million. Although there will be no direct income for the city, visitors and players will spend money on gas, food, hotels, restaurants, apartments, and in local stores.

"It will certainly help our economy," Doyle says.

Besides the practice games for the U.S. team on the newly constructed field, games between the U.S. team and other foreign and college teams will be played at the local high schools. Much of the concession money will go to the Mission Viejo Soccer Foundation.

The money the World Cup will generate all over the country is staggering. Some of the biggest names in merchandise are sponsors of the World Cup. Not missing the advertising boat are Coca-Cola, Gillete, MasterCard, McDonalds, and Snickers.

What is most important to Sampson is the team's ability to catapult the game of soccer into an unheard of popularity.

"This is the greatest single sporting event in the world and the finest playing surfaces in the world," Sampson explains. "We have everything to gain and lose."

Sampson feels that if the U.S. Team can get beyond the second round, it will be a significant accomplishment.

"I think we will be very competitive," he adds.

As for the *construction* team, there is still time for them to become serious soccer fans. □