



The Man Behind M.S. Deal Stadium in Granite Falls, NC

G.C. Trivett

By Bob Tracinski

Tucked in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina is M.S. Deal Stadium, the pride of the small town of Granite Falls. The stadium was built in the early 1940s, and the original field consisted of two to three feet of native soil, mostly hard-packed clay, over a pile of old granite rock. Initially, the stadium, field and school building formed the high school campus. In 1977, a new high school was built, and the facility became a middle school.

G.C. Trivett joined the Granite Falls Middle School staff that year, fresh from earning his degree in Health and Physical Education at Appalachian State University, as a physical education teacher, head football coach and athletic director. Groundskeeping was not part of his job or high on his list of priorities. The school's custodial staff mowed the bermudagrass field with a Bushhog.

The field was superior to the other school-related fields in the area. "Although we had a skinned infield and no formal field maintenance program, the field hosted the 1982 state baseball championship," Trivett recalls.

The field is used for baseball practices and games, softball practices and games, soccer practices and games, football practices and games, physical education classes and community sports programs. The school's baseball season begins February 15 and, with Legion games, the high school's tournament and the playoffs, could continue into mid-August, wrapping up just in time for football practice to begin. In addition, the field has hosted a state baseball championship, two state American Legion championships, two Region 10 National Junior College championships, numerous Division I college baseball games and several high school tournaments.

Granite Falls lies just within the transition zone; 30 miles to the northwest

only cool-season grasses will survive. Though winter does bring some snow and a few sub-zero days, winter temperatures average about 50 degrees, generally allowing year-round field use.

Trivett strives to do the best job possible. He is constantly learning, improving his skills, and looking for a better way to do things. He readily admits that, even when calling on all available resources, trial and error are a big part of this process. "Frequently, my best teacher has been my own bad experience from trying something the first time," he relates.

His interest in field conditions developed from his desire for safe playing surfaces that allow all players to make the most of their potential. At first, he initiated small changes. The mowing moved from a Bushhog to a flail mower to a rotary mower, and field conditions improved.

In 1983, an inspection team for the school district condemned the poles of the old lighting system and decided that a middle school didn't really need a lighted field. "Those were fighting words," Trivett notes. "A few individuals got the ball rolling, and it spread throughout the town. Through a concentrated but highly informal process of donations and fundraising activities, the commu-



Head groundskeeper G.C. Trivett takes the same care with pre-game preparations of the skinned areas as any minor league team would.

nity came up with the \$43,000 needed in just two months. The new lighting system was installed in 1983."

Learning From Others

In 1986 Trivett attended a seminar on athletic-field management given by Dr. Ed Kajihiro. He immediately joined the STMA and began reading all he could regarding sports turf management. He attended as many field-maintenance seminars as his time and budget would allow. "I was especially motivated by Floyd Perry's seminar at Baseball City in Orlando, FL, in 1991," says Trivett. "Seeing the facility, the quality of the fields, and how much money went into the equipment and budget was like a challenge for me. I wanted to do it right and knew with the big spirit of our little community we'd find a way to accomplish it."

Also in 1991, Trivett became a member of the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) and has since become the national organization's 43rd certified grounds manager. "Going through the program and achieving the certification was well worth the effort," Trivett says. Trivett also is a certified pes-



Most of the football field lies within the baseball outfield area. The sideline of the football field almost touches the grass at second base, and the skinned basepath between second and third bases lies just within the football field.

ticide applicator and a member of the NC Turfgrass Council and the Southern Turfgrass Association. Recently he has spoken at several seminars, helping others find a way to improve their fields. In February 1994, Floyd Perry held a seminar at M.S. Deal Field.

Trivett says, "I came into this knowing nothing about field care but found that all the resources are there just waiting to be tapped. The key is going after that information — reading the magazines and association publications, going to the seminars, and not being shy about asking questions and seeking advice, in person and by phone. Then, after gathering the information, you need to work through it and put it to use in a form that fits your needs."

As Trivett learned the principles of aeration, fertilization and pest control, those maintenance practices became an integral part of his field maintenance program. An initial soil test revealed little organic matter and several deficiencies. Composted sawdust was added as an organic source. Each year's fertilization program was adapted to specific needs. P and K ratios and organic content are now regularly in the acceptable range.

Equipment on a Budget

Equipment was a high priority, but Trivett recalls that the budget was pretty slim. "We began to acquire the necessary equipment, such as aerators, sprayers and mowers, through the process of creative begging," he admits. "It wasn't quite that bad, but we did call golf courses, schools, colleges and anyone else who could help with equipment to set up a borrowing or short-term rental situation."

Trivett looks for equipment that doesn't stress his budget yet can meet specific needs, improve field conditions and increase efficiency. "We put out the word that we were looking for used equipment that could be refurbished," he explains. "We purchased our triplex reel mower from a local golf course. It's now 23 years old. I just made a 14-hour round trip to pick up a used bunker rake. I took it in for repairs, replaced the sand rake with an infield drag, and it works great. We also entered a joint-purchase, split-use arrangement with two other schools on some new equipment, including our sprayer with a 20-foot-boom."

Trivett's assistant Bronze Baker handles the lion's share of the mowing and

an assortment of other tasks as necessary. Trivett says, "Baker is dedicated to this field and doing things right. His assistance has allowed us to move up one more notch in our maintenance program."

Trivett is the first to note that the road to success has not been trouble-free. For example, in the fall of 1986 he overseeded the Tifway 419 bermudagrass field with a cool-season grass for added color and cushioning. Unfortunately, he used K-31 fescue. "I didn't know any better at

the time," he says. Now, nine years later, he has almost made the transition back to 100 percent bermudagrass. "I had to do it gradually, with maintenance practices that favored the bermudagrass, because the fescue took hold so well, wiping it out at once would have devastated the field."

Trivett spurred the purchase of an automatic irrigation system using Toro 670 heads that was both workable and

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Trivett

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affordable. Funds for the project were raised by selling advertising space on the eight-foot block outfield wall. Trivett takes a little time at the start of each season to drop in on past advertisers and sell the space for another year. The 35 to 40 ads currently bring in \$150 each. Trivett and a group of volunteers did the installation. While a few areas needed a second try with a little more glue on the joints, the end result was great.

Most of Trivett's efforts have met with success. In 1990, the skinned infield was sodded with Tifway 419 bermudagrass. Again Trivett used a volunteer crew with no previous experience, this time with no glitches. Laying sod green side up is a lot easier than installing irrigation pipe and sprinkler heads.

Next came the warning-track installation. Trivett used a two-to-three inch layer of local gray granite rock dust on top of an area that he had treated with glyphosate to remove vegetation. The track is 15 feet wide in the outfield and ten feet wide along the sidelines. It also happens to be exactly a quarter-mile around, making it great for physical education classes, track and recreation for local exercise fans.

Maintenance Practices

With 350 students on some part of the field nearly every school day and all the after-school and community activities, the field has little, if any, downtime. Trivett has developed an aggressive maintenance program to keep the field in top shape. He core aerates once a month from May to September,

using a double pass on the entire field and adding a second double pass in high-use areas. The cores are dragged back in for topdressing. Additional topdressing material, including calcined clay, sand and a more porous soil are incorporated when time and funds allow it.

"We've reached a fairly decent percolation rate through this program," says Trivett. "Generally we can take a two-inch rain and still play within two hours, but when this heavy soil becomes saturated, water infiltration is very slow. We've used 21 bags of calcined clay during this spring's rains, but we haven't missed a game."

Annual soil tests form the basis for the fertilization program. Trivett applies a 10-10-10 fertilizer at the rate of 750 pounds per acre in the early spring. Monthly application of 34-0-0 begins in June. Overseeding with the PhD blend of perennial ryegrasses takes place in October, timed to coincide with optimum weather conditions.

Using a reel mower at alternating right angles creates a checkerboard pattern, and during the football season, mowing direction is alternated every five yards to create a light-dark striping. The field is kept at a 3/4-inch height, with the outfield cut at least three times a week and the infield daily — twice on game days.

Trivett changed the management program slightly to accommodate this season's extremely wet weather. "We sure didn't run the irrigation system in June," he notes. "We had to use the rotary mower at one point to cut the grass short enough for the reel mower to handle. We then began mowing the outfield every day and the infield twice a day just to keep up."

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices dictate pest control. Trivett says, "So far, we've only had to contend with grubs once or twice. We've had a few problems with clover and chickweed, and are using a three-way formula to control them. We've had to treat for crabgrass occasionally. We use a handheld tank sprayer filled with glyphosate to spot treat any weeds that crop up in the warning track."

Trivett takes the same care with pre-game preparations of the skinned areas as any minor league team. "We nail drag two or three times a year," he notes. "I use the mat drag before each game, then again after the infield practices when I reset the bases." Trivett also mat drags once more and changes the bases again after the fifth inning. "Our greatest wear comes during girl's softball in the fall," he says. "The bases must be moved in to attain the regulation size. Second base is in the grass, and the grassed sections by first and third base get heavy wear. These areas generally need resodding at least once during and after the season."

Excessive wear is avoided by rotating practice sessions and drills for various sports along with PE class workouts. Football drill sites are moved each day. Soccer goals are simulated with strategically-placed cones to avoid wear within the actual goal mouth.

Trivett has enough space in the baseball outfield to turn the football-soccer field at an angle to the baseball field, limiting wear on the infield. The football sideline closest to the stands almost touches the grass at second base and the skinned basepath between second and third bases lies just within the football field. The grassed baseball outfield then becomes the rest of the football-soccer field.

The pile of granite rock below the field creates a unique field maintenance situation for Trivett. "We hit granite when we

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installed the lighting system, and even a two-inch nail drag used in the infield will bring some rocks to the surface," he explains. "Since that's one condition we can't change, we've just made rock removal a part of our maintenance program."

Community Support

How does Trivett get all this done and fit in his full load of teaching, coaching and athletic director duties? "I told the Booster Club and community supporters that Bronce and I would do the field planning and work. They had to do everything else. The community took it to heart."

"The Booster Club even runs the concession stands for all activities, not just the school-related ones. All proceeds are channeled back into the athletic department," he explains. "They pay for the equipment and uniforms, make up the major portion of our operating budget, and even made it possible to build the concession and press box building."

Trivett's family is his personal booster club. His wife Karen is a physical education teacher and head basketball coach at one of the county high schools. His son Cory, who will be a high school senior, participates in both track and basketball, and his future plans include teaching PE and coaching. Trivett says, "I couldn't do any of this without their cooperation with the hectic schedule and their enthusiasm for what we've been able to accomplish."

How far has M.S. Deal Stadium come since 1986? The Chicago White Sox single-A team, the Hickory Crawdads, had chosen the field as a backup site for play if their own stadium had not been completed by the start of the season.

"There's no need to have a middle class facility for a middle school," notes Trivett. "If you have the dream and the commitment, you'll find the necessary knowledge and support waiting for you." □

Bob Tracinski is the manager of communications for the John Deere Company in Raleigh, NC, and public relations co-chair for the national Sports Turf Managers Association.

HAPPENINGS

West Coast Turf Expands Operations

West Coast Turf of Palm Desert, CA, recently acquired the assets of Warren's Turf of Winchester, CA. Warren's Turf was established in 1938 by Ben Warren and was instrumental in the early development of sod farms and sod harvesting equipment. The 200 acres in Winchester feature three types of hybrid bermuda, as well as St. Augustine and tall fescue. This acquisition continues the company's expansion, which has included the 1994 purchase of Foster Turf Products and the opening of a facility in Las Vegas, NV.

PGMS Offers Corporate Membership

A new company-membership level was recently inaugurated by the Professional Grounds Maintenance Society. Until now, membership was restricted to individual groundskeeping professionals. Company membership dues are \$350 per year, which includes up to four full individual PGMS memberships; first opportunity for sponsoring a PGMS Conference, publications or other program elements; a free half-page advertisement per year in the *PGMS Forum*; and a listing as a company member in the PGMS Membership Directory.

The 1995 edition of the directory, *Who's Who in Grounds Management*, is now available. The 80-page book is free to members and \$38 to nonmembers. (Maryland residents add \$1.90 sales tax.) To order, write to: PGMS, 120 Cockeysville Rd., Suite 104, Hunt Valley, MD 21030. Payment must be included with order. Visa and MasterCard accepted. For more information, call (410) 584-9754. Fax: (410) 574-9756.

Rain Bird Announces Personnel Changes

Kevin Gordon was recently promoted by Rain Bird Sales Inc. of Tucson, AZ, to product manager. He will relocate to the company's facility in San Diego, CA, from Denver, CO, where he was previously the district sales manager for the Rocky Mountain states. Gordon

is a member of the Montana Association of Nurserymen, Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado and the American Society of Landscape Architects. He earned a bachelor of arts degree from Southern Illinois University and an MBA from the University of Colorado.

Rain Bird Sprinkler Manufacturing Co. is headquartered in Glendora, CA.

Seed Company Named Official Supplier

Seed Research of Oregon, Inc., in Corvallis reached an agreement with SMA Services Corp., a subsidiary of the Stadium Managers Association, to become its official seed supplier. The list of SMA stadiums includes such big names as Yankee Stadium, New York; Mile High Stadium, Denver, CO; R.F.K. Stadium, Washington, DC; Soldier Field and Wrigley Field, Chicago, IL; and Candlestick Park, San Francisco, CA.

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