

Munson Stadium Shines as Pro Diamond of Year

By Bob Tracinski

Thurman Munson Memorial Stadium is a shining example of the science and art of sports turf management melding in a dynamic working partnership. This gem of the City of Canton, OH, was just selected the 1995-1996 Beam Clay® Professional Diamond of the Year.

The ballfield of Thurman Munson Memorial Stadium stood as an oasis of green throughout the 1995 season while other fields and golf courses around it suffered tremendous turf damage from the searing heat and high humidity.

Munson field handled the 70 game home schedule of its Canton Indians, the AA Minor League affiliate of the Cleveland Indians. Then it stood up to 39 amateur games. In all, from April 8 through September 30, 1995, 109 games were played on the field of the facility devoted exclusively to baseball. In addition, the Canton Indians held three day-long baseball camps for area youth.

And this was a field in its first year of play. Reconstruction, which began on September 30 of 1994, had been completed just 1 1/2 months later, on November 15.

Robert D. Patt, manager of the Canton Civic Center and Munson Stadium, determined from the outset that field reconstruction and maintenance would be based on the scientific input of a

crack consultant team. And he knew who had the ability and dedication to deftly combine that science with art to create and maintain pro-level quality on a daily basis: Kevan Lindsey, field foreman for the Canton Recreation Department and now also head groundskeeper of Munson Stadium.

Patt says, "Prior to reconstruction, a combination of heavy native soil, compaction, and inadequate underground drainage made surface drainage a constant problem. We'd adopted an aggressive aeration program, but during the summer of 1994, we had ten inches of rainfall in one month and standing water in the outfield. Slitters helped drain surface water, but wet spots persisted. We needed a long-term solution."

Patt Answers

In typical fashion, Patt researched reconstruction options "thoroughly." Patt has spent 22 years in city management positions, and applied those basic management principles to the Munson project. "I exhausted every avenue I could track down, calling people and asking questions," says Patt.

The City of Canton selected S.W. Franks Construction Company of Cleveland, OH, for the renovation project. "Franks' reputation for quality work was proven in the recently installed new playing surfaces in Kansas City at

the Royals' Kaufman Stadium and the Chiefs' Arrowhead Stadium, as well as on the incomparable Jacobs Field in Cleveland, home of our Cleveland Indians," says Patt. "Munson Field was specified to replicate the playing surface at Jacobs Field because of the similar geographic and climatic conditions, and the player development association with the parent club."

Lindsey came on board in the head groundskeeper position at the beginning of the renovation project. "We wanted a groundskeeper who was both knowledgeable and conscientious," says Patt. "Kevan had proven his dedication throughout his ten years with the Recreation Department, always putting in the time and effort to get the job done right."

Intent on carrying out his philosophy, Patt didn't stop there. "If you surround good people with a good support team," he says, "you're not going to fail."

He enlisted the aid of Murray Cook, field director of the West Palm Beach Stadium Authority in Florida (and winner of the Beam Clay Field of the Year Award for 1993-1994), who served as consultant and on-site construction manager during the project and continues as part of the consulting team.

Jamie Heydinger of The O.M. Scott Company was on the consulting team from the beginning. Patt says, "Heydinger



A combination of art and science turned Thurman Munson Memorial Stadium into a field that can handle virtually any adversity. Photos courtesy: Robert Patt.

basically outlined the maintenance program for the sand rootzone and turf based on his knowledge of the best programs for our specific site and weather."

In addition, Patt brought in Chuck Dixon of Turf Diagnostics and Design, Inc., of Olathe, KS, for consultation and on-going soil and tissue analysis. Dr. David York, of Tournament Turf Laboratories in Vallengia, PA, also conducts turf tissue analysis.

"The results of this scientific data are supplied to Heydinger on a monthly basis so he can adjust nutrient levels in accordance with plant needs and current humidity, irrigation and weather conditions," says Patt.

Other participants in Patt's consulting team have come through equally well. He says, "Brandon Koenke, groundskeeper for the Cleveland Indians, is always available to help. Paul Bozek of North Coast Distributing serves as consultant for the Toro irrigation system, responding immediately to post-installation questions and concerns. And the cooperation and flexibility within our own city team has been outstanding. John Reese, recreation supervisor (and Lindsey's immediate supervisor), and Tony Corsi of the Department of Public Works have assisted throughout the reconstruction and follow-up maintenance, supplying equipment and personnel whenever it was needed. Vince Patterozzi of the Cleveland Browns helped out with advice and equipment, too."

Science is at work in the new Munson Field. Patt says, "The field is constructed over 7,000 feet of perforated, corrugated, polyethylene drain pipe installed in trenches in the subgrade spaced on 20-

foot centers. The field drains are connected to a perimeter drainage line, which is connected to the appropriate storm drain locations.

"The drainage system is covered with a three-inch layer of washed gravel. Above this is a nine-inch, blended, rootzone mix of 95 percent non-calcareous, washed, processed (silica) sand, which meets United States Golf Association (USGA) physical evaluation protocol, and five percent Dakota peat. The turf is a blend of gold tag certified bluegrass sod. The irrigation system consists of 7,100 feet of irrigation pipe connected to a 12-zone, 63-head Toro automatic irrigation system. This system uses a mix of Super 700 and 640 series rotary sprinkler heads.

"The infield skinned area is a local clay base topped with Tennessee Morie clay mix and a blend of Beam Clay red brick dust and Soilmaster. The pitching mounds and home plate areas are main-



The infield takes shape atop a new drainage system.

tained with Beam Clay red mound mix. The warning track is crushed red brick supplied by the locally based Belden Brick Company."

The Payoff

Did all this scientific analysis pay off? As Lindsey says, "Surface drainage on the new field is as natural as water going down the bathtub drain. With the constant input of scientific information, the turf has top growing conditions, adjusted to meet changing needs. When you give grass what it needs, when it needs it, it pretty much takes care of itself."

This isn't to say a lot of tender, loving care won't help. Patt says, "Kevan practically lived at the field during the reconstruction and that first season. I think he knew every blade of grass personally. He was on the alert for any



While the infield was being sodded, the nine-inch-deep rootzone for the outfield was prepared.

change in growth pattern, coloration, or apparent vigor. It gave us an extremely fast action-reaction system."

Play started the first of April in 1995, and the turf was in great shape. There were some initial problems with the clay areas. Winter weather had closed in soon after the reconstruction was completed, and stayed around for the duration. Lindsey says, "The clay area at home plate and the mound drew a lot more moisture than we'd anticipated. The sand retained a great deal of moisture during the sudden temperature drop, and this moisture moved up and under the tarped clay surfaces. Certain areas of the base path also drew moisture and entered the season wetter — and thus softer — than we wanted. We ended up replacing the clay mix in some areas, reworking it in others, to achieve the moisture content and texture we wanted."

With 30 inches of snow by the end of January 1996, Lindsey prepared for some wet clay entering spring. He says, "Weather permitting, we'll remove the tarps earlier in the season to allow more time for air drying before play begins."

The second challenge for the first-year field could have been even greater. Extended periods of temperatures in the 90 and 100 degree range combined with extremely high humidity aren't the norm for Cleveland — or cool-season turf. Fungus problems devastated area grasses. But Lindsey's constant observation (the art), combined with continual input from the consulting team (the science), resulted in a full season of good-looking, highly playable turf.

No Shortcuts

Management practices also contributed to success. Munson Field has a

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Kevan Lindsey, field foreman for the Canton Recreation Department and now head groundskeeper of Munson Stadium, practically lived at the field during the reconstruction.

Pro Diamond

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\$90,000 operating budget. Daily maintenance equipment includes a ride-on reel mower, a power field-rake and a utility vehicle, along with standard hand tools.

Lindsey has a five-person crew, all currently in college. One crew member had recreation department experience; one had golf course experience. The rest of the training Lindsey supplied himself. "I started each person on a specific job, covering the basics and proper techniques and giving them the time to gain proficiency at that task. One person concentrated on mowing, another on mound preparation, and so forth. As their experience levels grew, so did their job responsibilities. They're a hard-working crew and developed into a real good team," Lindsey says.

Patt challenged Lindsey to maintain the field without some of the traditional "shortcuts," like cutouts for coaches boxes or fungo circles. These areas are painted on the turf at Munson Stadium, just as they are at Jacobs Field.

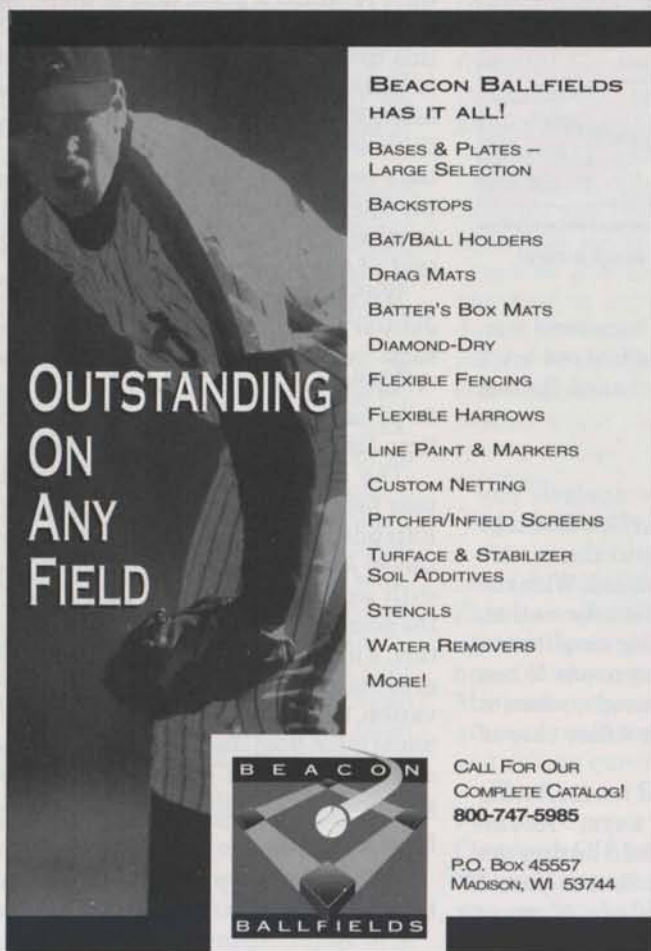
Lindsey says, "We used a two-prong, step-on aerator to relieve compaction in the coaches boxes and fungo circles. We kept applying small amounts of seed and occasionally topdressed lightly with sand. We mixed TurfGrids® into the sand profile around home plate and the pitchers mound when the field was installed. Toward the end of the season, we did show some wear at the batting cages and did cut out a wider swath of skinned area at first and third base, where the players round the corners, to alleviate wear there, but overall the turf held up well. We alternate mowing directions at every mowing and occasionally do delay mowing until later in the day following heavy rains. But the new field's growing conditions are so good, we've had to make few maintenance adjustments."

Lindsey also maintains a small "sod farm" in a 30-foot by three-foot section of the bullpen. He says, "With the same turf varieties growing on our rootzone mix under the same maintenance practices, I have about 20 rolls of 'insurance' on hand, if I need it."

Lindsey also works closely with the team's coaching and management staff to fine-tune field maintenance to produce the conditions they prefer. And he confers with the ultimate critics themselves. "I talk to the players at every level, asking what they like and don't like," says Lindsey. "Every time I'm on the field I'm looking for what we can do to make it better."

Patt says, "There aren't any tricks to this. Science and the numbers don't lie. When the proper technical data is given to a top team of knowledgeable people, there's no trial and error to problem solving. Then you provide that scientific support to a hands-on sports turf manager with the 'eye' to see what's happening on the field and the knowledge, dedication and commitment to do what it takes to apply those scientific solutions precisely as needed. It saves time, money and frustration. The better the team, the better the results." □

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



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