



Before conversion, Offenbach Stadium was a typical European soccer stadium.

Offenbach Stadium is a typical European soccer stadium that showed off not only its age but its charm as well.

Cook's Tour of Germany

By Murray Cook

The need for competitive sports fields has increased dramatically over the past ten years, with sporting events now taking place around the world on a daily basis. Europe, the hub of the soccer empire, is now developing an interest in other types of sports. American football has grown in popularity over the years, and during the weekend of June 3 last year in Frankfurt, Germany, the national pastime of baseball made a major league European debut.

It was part of a very successful diplomatic tour called "The American Sports Weekend" – an event featuring baseball, football and a three-on-three basketball tournament. Major League Baseball International worked closely with the promoters and local sponsors to make the event a success.

During the day on Saturday, a baseball clinic was held for over 300 German amateur players from local clubs. The Nordic Vikings then took on the Frankfurt Knights in a football game on Saturday night, and on Sunday afternoon the Major League Baseball Veterans played the German National team in a baseball game. The baseball and football games drew over 5,000 each at Offenbach Stadium.

Offenbach Stadium is a typical European soccer stadium that showed off not only its age but its charm as well. The facility was constructed in 1923 and has been used for international sports play over the years. The stadium will hold 15,000, but many seating sections were in need of repair, and the surrounding common areas were overgrown with vegetation. The existing turf was a "cocktail" of various weeds and bluegrasses with occasional areas of *Poa annua*.

The maintenance of the turf is contracted out to a local landscape company that is also responsible for the clean up of the stadium. There was no doubt that the playing surface met the standards for the local soccer teams, but it fell far below the standards that the American professionals were used to. The local groundskeeper who tended the field was very proud of the turf and left when the field transition began on Friday.

The transition for the soccer field involved painting the lines for the football game and installing the first, third and home plate turf cutouts, which were not in play for the football game. The sod on the cutouts had to be taken out at a two-inch depth, and a sandy loam was used to bring the level of the cutouts back up to the grade of the existing turf. A sod cutter

was requested for this work, but the country did not seem to have one, so the areas were removed using hand tools. After the football game, the field was rolled with a two-ton roller, and the mound, second base and bullpen areas were constructed during the night before the baseball game.

Also, the additional fencing that circled the entire soccer field was installed. The backstop netting and the right field "Green Monster" were over 30 feet high. (Since the right-field line of the baseball diamond was only 230 feet, we needed something to help keep the line drives from leaving the park on every pitch.)

It was very difficult to find a heavy clay material for the construction of the mound. We searched the Frankfurt area until we found a molding clay or gray gumbo that had the possibility of being used. The existing soil under the turf was a rich black topsoil. It was very high in organic material and provided no compaction whatsoever. To construct a mound material, we took the clay and sliced the silty material into the sandy loam that was used for the base cutouts. This actually worked and provided a stable mound for the teams to use (for one day). As we constructed the mound, a group of 45



Conversion of Offenbach Stadium called for construction of dugouts, all netting and fencing, a warning track, batting practice equipment, mounds and goal posts for football.

local players and coaches took notes and asked questions.

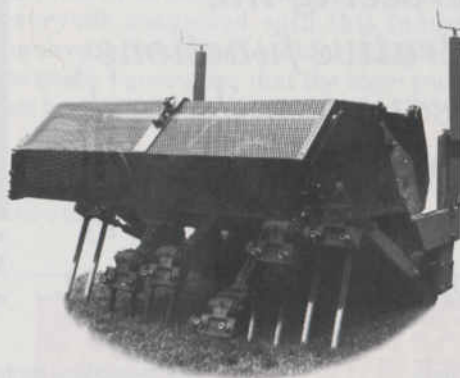
The grounds crew was comprised of volunteers from the baseball teams who were attending the camp and clinics. Many of the players were glad to be of help in constructing the field. It was definitely a team effort, and like the "spirit of diplomacy," the beer flowed freely throughout the evening and weekend. It was fortunate that there were a few players who did not partake in the beverages, or our task before the games would have been even more difficult to complete.

Our planning for the event was in-depth and often focused on the equipment that had to be on hand for the conversion. We assumed our needs were clear to the Germans. This was probably our biggest mistake while planning the event. The first rule is never assume anything. The Germans had no concept of how or what is needed in creating a playing field for baseball. Though they were eager to please us with affirmative answers to questions, the communication breakdown was sure to happen.

After we arrived in Frankfurt, it was obvious that we had a long way to go to make the project a successful one, and patience was needed more than anything else. Things do work out for the best if people work towards the same goals. The event was deemed a success by all.

As in the American turf industry, sports turf managers worldwide can achieve professional unity if their goals are the same, enhancing their industry's success. After taking part in several of these friendship tours in various countries and planning others in the future, I find it deeply rewarding to be in this profession and hope by sharing these thoughts you too may be inspired to work towards the common goal of making our industry successful worldwide. □

Murray Cook serves as stadium manager for the Atlanta Braves/Montreal Expos spring training facility and as a turf consultant for other athletic fields.



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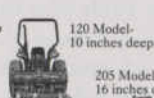
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