Imagine a year-round sports complex encompassing nine venues filled with state-of-the-art facilities where athletes young and old, amateur and professional, compete and train for more than 30 sports. The Walt Disney Company did and, in August 1995, began constructing Disney's Wide World of Sports, a 200-acre complex that opened this past spring in Orlando, Florida.

"It's all top-of-the-line," says STMA member Murray Cook, manager of the complex's baseball stadium. Everything at Disney's Wide World of Sports testifies to that statement:

- the Tifway 419 bermuda throughout all turfgrass venues, offering 7 to 10 inches of drainage per hour;
- the picturesque Mediterranean architecture by David M. Schwarz, who created The Ballpark in Arlington for the Texas Rangers; and
- the agreements Disney reached with Toro to provide its finest turf equipment and with Musco to supply its best lighting. Toro will assume a maintenance role for 80 acres of turf throughout the complex and will put its name on the 4 1/2-acre Town Green, where award ceremonies and other public events will be held.

Thirty-two sports can be held in tournaments and festivals 365 days a year: aerobics, archery, badminton, baseball, basketball, beach volleyball, body building, boxing, fencing, field hockey, football, gymnastics, in-line skating, judo, karate, lacrosse, martial arts, power lifting, roller hockey, rugby, running, soccer, softball, table tennis, tae kwon do, team handball, tennis, track and field, tumbling, volleyball, weight lifting, and wrestling. The complex hopes soon to add a 10th venue for a 33rd sport, cycling. Disney bought the velodrome built at Stone Mountain Park near Atlanta for the 1996 Summer Olympics and plans to have it installed by the end of this year.

Recently, Disney's Wide World of Sports became the official training camp of the Harlem Globetrotters and the new home of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), hosting over 25 of its national championships this year and 50 by the year 2000. Disney also signed an agreement of cooperation with South Africa that is bound to bring to the complex many of the country's soccer, cricket, rugby and other events.

That's for starters. As the following listing illustrates, much more is planned.

A multi-colored walkway leads visitors from the complex's main entrance between the baseball stadium and fieldhouse to the Town Green, where paths branch out to other ball fields. Photos courtesy: Disney's Wide World of Sports.
The Baseball Stadium

Home of the Atlanta Braves spring training beginning in 1998, the double-decker baseball stadium is the tallest of all spring-training sites and was designed to replicate the best professional stadiums. It encompasses a deep seating bowl with over 7,500 extra-wide, permanent seats, 80 percent of them between first and third base, as well as 1,300 additional spaces on the lawn, four luxury sky boxes and two open-air suites.

Equipped with four batting tunnels, spacious locker and training rooms, suite-level executive offices, and a conference room that overlooks the field, the baseball stadium is, as Braves General Manager John Schuerholz put it, "the finest baseball spring-training facility in the world — bar none." A 20-year agreement with Disney's Wide World of Sports guarantees the Braves will celebrate 50 years of spring training in Florida.

The stadium will be managed and maintained under the leadership of turf specialist Murray Cook, former baseball manager for the Braves and Montreal Expos West Palm spring-training site. Murray brings his internationally recognized expertise in 21 years of sports turf maintenance to the baseball stadium.

Dimensions: left field, 330 ft.; right field, 330 ft.; right/left field alleys, 380 ft.; center field, 400 ft.; home plate to backstop, 60 ft.; baseline to dugout step, 41 ft.

Program Manager: Sharon Swainson.
Baseball Quadraplex

Located in the shadow of the baseball stadium, the baseball quadraplex features four professional fields and one half field — each constructed on native soil and eight inches of rootzone mix, with infields of 80 percent sand and 20 percent clay and 20-foot warning tracks embellished with crushed brick. Field C is equipped for night play with six light poles and 174 1,500-watt metal halide fixtures.

The area between Field C and Field D is equipped with 10,000 square feet of batting tunnels, pitching mounds, four hitting tunnels and four masters pitching machines. A pitching area sporting 10 bullpens lies between Field A and Field B.

The Atlanta Braves organization will use the baseball quadraplex during extended spring training and the Gulf Coast League season in 1997. The Braves' Major League players will use the facility full-time beginning with the 1998 spring-training season. In addition a number of top-level baseball tournaments, training sessions, clinics and fantasy camps will use the facility year-round.


The Fieldhouse

With over 30,000 square feet of competition space on the bottom floor alone, the fieldhouse is a model multi-purpose arena with great flexibility, new-age playing surfaces and custom athlete training areas, including a 3,000-square-foot strength and conditioning room. Of the 5,000 seats, the highest row in the fieldhouse is only 35 feet off the ground of the 80-foot-high space. The built-in wood Connor playing surface holds up to four regulation basketball courts and has a minimum tested resistance of 270 pounds per square inch. An auxiliary area, with an additional 17,000-plus square feet, holds two more courts. A Porter curtaining system with 18 feet of mesh, topping the 10-foot temporary vinyl wall and acoustic wall throughout the arena, allows tournaments to run efficiently. Program Manager: Jeff Sturgeon.

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Softball Quadruplex

The softball quadruplex encompasses four softball diamonds in a giant circular pattern. Outfield fences measure 305 feet in a perfectly symmetrical configuration, although temporary fences are available for games when shorter distances are required. Each field accommodates fast and slow pitch softball and features bullpens for both teams as well as spacious dugouts and 16 helmet/equipment boxes per dugout.

The facility is scheduled to host 27 events this year featuring 10 different softball organizations. One centrally located tower overlooking all four diamonds offers press facilities, concession stands and an area for scorekeepers and officials. **Sports Operations Manager:** Ken Hackmeister.

Youth Baseball Fields

Many of the features built into the professional baseball facilities are also found at the two youth baseball fields: Tifway 419 bermudagrass, Major League infield mixes of 80 percent sand and 20 percent clay, and eight-feet-wide warning tracks made of crushed red brick. Other features include two dugouts per field, enclosed bullpens, six-foot outfield fences and bleacher seating for 250 spectators per field. Fields are wired for power pitching machines, and portable batting cages are available. The youth baseball fields will host Disney-created youth tournaments, AAU championship events and local tournaments. **Dimensions:** 200 ft. to all fields. **Sports Operations Manager:** Sharon Swainson.

Sports Fields

Located near the fieldhouse, the four sports fields provide a setting for football, soccer, lacrosse, archery, field hockey, cricket, ultimate frisbee and other sports. Four separate events can be contested on each of the fields simultaneously, or all four may be combined for the same tournament. The Tifway 419 bermudagrass is crowned with a one percent slope to enhance drainage. The field adjacent to the fieldhouse is equipped with six light poles and 144 Musco fixtures for night play. Each field can seat 10,000, while all four fields combined allow a maximum capacity of 30,000 spectators. **Dimensions:** each field is 105 by 68 meters (international soccer dimensions). **Sports Operations Manager:** Charles Davis.