

Step One: Hand rake and level where the infield drag cannot be used as well as in trouble spots around the bases. Diagrams courtesy: Dave Ashman.

Infield Grooming

By Dave Ashman

Remember Coach John Wooden's words of wisdom, "If you spend too much time learning the tricks of the trade, you may never learn the trade." This saying seems like it was written for turf managers as well as athletes.

Use the skinned area "fundamentals" outlined below to provide consistent playing conditions. Completing these procedures will keep the surface manageable while maintaining safe playing conditions. Safety and consistency are the key elements of a balanced plan. Maintaining proper conditions for teams to train and compete is your job.

General Guidelines

The following items should be included in the maintenance plan for working the skinned areas.

1. All skinned areas of the field need regular maintenance. The mound and home plate have special protocol to restore the desired conditions. The infield skin, the warning track, the "on deck" circle and other areas (some

fields have coaching boxes, plate access paths, etc.) require different protocol to restore the desired conditions. In your maintenance plan, you should schedule labor hours to work these areas. In a competitive situation the mound, home plate, base paths and infield skin will require daily work. The warning track and other areas should be worked once a week at a minimum.

2. Water is important to the skinned areas. Moisture keeps the base firm yet the top 1/4 inch soft, and assists in the reduction of damage from wind erosion. The correct amount of moisture will provide a higher level of playability and makes maintenance of the surface easier.

3. A conditioner such as calcine clay will assist in maintaining the correct level of moisture in the skinned area. Most conditioners are tools for water management in the playing surface. Some conditioners and amendments such as peat can assist in reducing maintenance costs.

4. The application of water should be as close to simulating rainfall as

possible. Hold the nozzle of the hose as high as comfortable and provide a slight arc to the stream of water. There are several brands of quality nozzles that should be available in your area.

5. As you prepare a field for practice, train your staff as if you are preparing for a game. In this case time will not be an issue if something goes wrong. There will be plenty of time to fix any problems without game day pressure. Practice before the first game to get the routine down.

6. Practice preparations should be done in the morning (weather permitting) to allow enough time for the surface to dry. Use the irrigation system to cover as much of the infield skin as possible. In the areas where the system cannot reach, use the hose to water those areas. If too much water is accidentally applied there is usually enough time for the skin to dry.

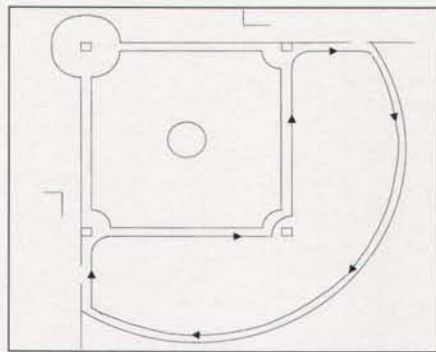
7. Always tarp the mound, home plate and the bases when the irrigation system is operating.

8. When completing game preparations, timing is the key element of this

process. You want to allow enough time for the skin to reach optimum conditions prior to the start of the game. Complete this process using a hose and not the irrigation system. Uniform distribution of water is critical to achieving the desired playing conditions. You want the skin damp, but not soaked. A good consistent color along with an absence of puddles, standing water or clumps of material will be the benchmark for the correct amount of water on the groomed surface.

9. Sweeping the turf edges will prevent materials from building up in the turf causing a "lip" to form. To complete this procedure, take a broom or a flex rake and sweep all loose material lying on the turf back onto the skinned surface. Then remove any grass that is swept onto the infield skin.

10. The nail drag is the best kept secret of major league turf managers. This should be done as often as possible, a minimum of once a week. This will keep the top 3/8 to 5/8 inch loose and friable. Not only does it make the field safer by relieving compaction,



Step Two: Drag the perimeter of the infield skin. Do this twice, once in each direction, and start and stop in a different spot each time you drag the field.

but it makes the surface easier to groom. If there is a compaction problem, add weight to the nail drag — which will force the drag to scarify a little deeper into the skinned area.

11. The skinned area should be dragged daily throughout the year. This process will keep the infield skin in a playable condition year

round. You want the skin to be loose, level, and consistent. There are many ways to complete this step; however, there are rules that should be strictly followed.

The skinned area must be slightly moist before any nail dragging can begin.

It is important to drag the field slowly. The slower the speed, the more consistent the results. Dragging the field quickly will spread infield mix where you do not want it and will create an uneven surface.

To begin the process, slowly drag around the perimeter of the skinned area first, then begin your dragging pattern. It is important to leave at least a six-inch buffer between the drag and the edge of the turf while dragging. This will prevent infield mix from being pushed up into the edge of the turf by the drag. Use a rake and scarify the six-inch buffer area. You should **alternate the starting and stopping points daily** or you will create high and low spots on the

continued on page 26

RAINCOVER Plus™

LEADING THE WAY IN SPORTS FIELD COVER TECHNOLOGY ...



COVER HANDLING SYSTEM

This lightweight roller can be made to any length from 20' to 50'. Complete with end caps for extra safety.



NEW!

THE TARP MACHINE™

The easy way to roll large field covers. Attaches to P.T.O. system on your tractor.

CALL FOR FREE VIDEO!

Raincover Plus™ is the ultimate infield protection cover. Developed by Covermaster's technical research, test results* show that its special color combination reduces potential heat build up under the cover better than any other cover. It's also stronger, lightweight and easy to handle.

**COVERMASTER
COVERMASTER
COVERMASTER**

MASTERS IN THE ART OF SPORTS SURFACE COVERS

Call us for a sample and full details of the latest in raincover technology.

* Available upon request.

CALL TOLL FREE AT 1-800-387-5808



MEMBER OF:

COVERMASTER INC., 100 WESTMORE DR., 11-D, REXDALE, ON, M9V 5C3 TEL 416-745-1811 FAX 416-74-COVER (742-6837)

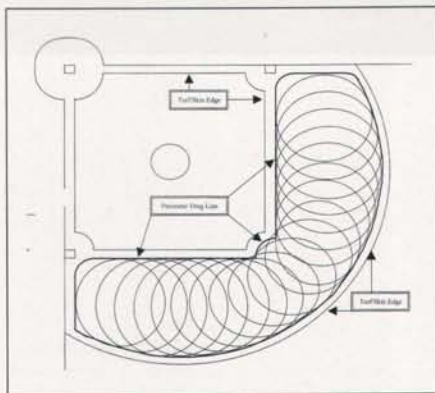
Infield Grooming

continued from page 25

skinned area. Always distribute the small pile of material that accumulates on the drag evenly with a landscape rake.

12. Following the nail drag procedure, drag your field with a rigid screen drag equipped with a leveling bar on the front edge. This assists in leveling the material and filling the low spots.

13. Flexible drags have a habit of dipping into the low spots and doing little to restore the grade of the area. A rigid drag will fill the low spots and make the surface level. To achieve the same benefits as dragging, you can use a landscape rake to scarify the base paths. This should be done lengthwise instead of side to side. Side-to-side raking will push loose material into the turf and create a "bowled out" path. It is beneficial to complete this process after edging to restore the even plane to the "turf/skin" edge. The base paths should be firmer than the infield skin.



Step Three: Drag the entire infield skin (twice in each direction). Use large, overlapping circles and keep a safe distance from the turf. Drive slowly and at a consistent speed.

The players require traction to increase their running speed. They also want bunts to roll down the base path and not die in the loose material. What conditions does the coach want?

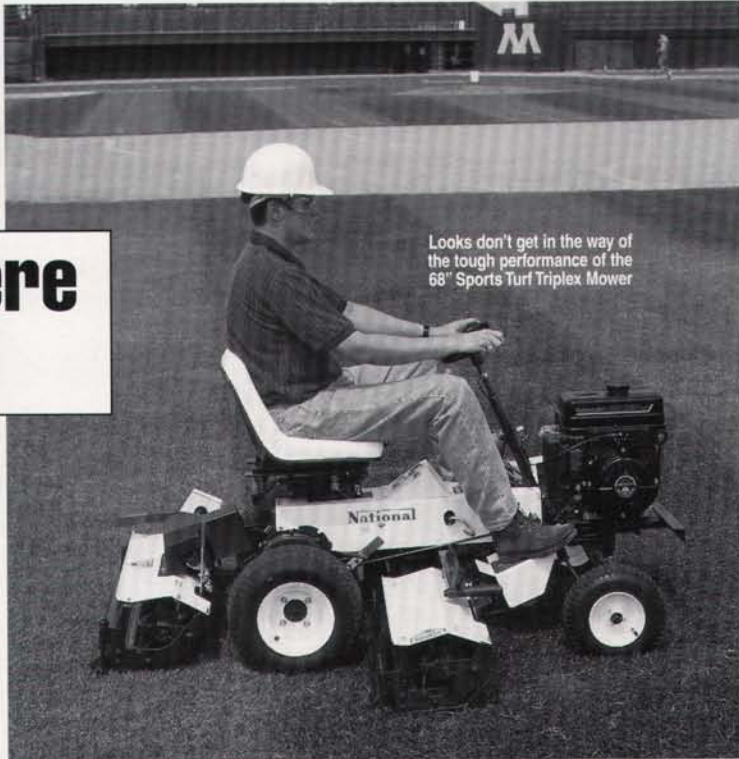
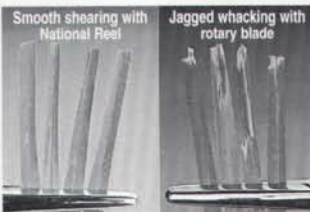
Plan of Action

Recommended equipment and materials: Bunker rake, drag mat,

nail drag, t-head rake, landscape rake, rotary spreader, warehouse broom, hose, spray nozzle, watering can or Hudson sprayer, materials — calcine clay, infield mix and water.

1. Sweep the infield edges, remove and store bases, then install caps.
2. Evaluate the infield, look for high and low spots.
3. Hand rake the 1st, 2nd and 3rd base areas, especially the low spots from sliding, etc.
4. Moisten (lightly) the skinned area.
5. Nail drag and add material where needed.
6. Drag the skinned area with a leveling bar drag.
7. Rake the baselines.
8. Water down the skinned areas, with an ample amount of water without pounding. Do not allow a hose to drag across the skinned area!

Dave Ashman is head of the consulting firm Ashman & Associates in Long Beach, CA. The above comes from his book Sports Facilities Management.



Looks don't get in the way of the tough performance of the 68" Sports Turf Triplex Mower

Put The Looks Where It Counts Most

It may be cheap. It may be ugly. But the National 68" Sports Turf Mower is a tough performer. It's ugly because its built tough, and lasts a long time—we're talking ten, sometimes twenty years. It's so inexpensive you can easily afford to dedicate it just to your athletic fields. Its great flat-top clip on your turf turns into fantastic striping for your field. Pick-up the phone and request a free demo.

For details call: (612) 646-4079



700 Raymond Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55114
TEL (612) 646-4079
FAX (612) 646-2887

NATIONAL® is a Registered Trademark of National Mower Company

Nothing makes sports turf look better than a National. The Best Price. The Best Cutting.