

Pleasant View Sports Complex

STMA's College Soccer Field of the Year

by Bob Tracinski

Rising to the peaks is nothing new for Abby McNeal. She has based her career in Boulder, CO, in the foothills of the mighty Rocky Mountains. She excelled at Colorado State University in the landscape horticulture program, and chose a concentration in turfgrass management. She did so well that she earned the Colorado Sports Turf Managers Association scholarship twice, and the national STMA scholarship in 1993.

After completing her BS degree in 1994, McNeal maintained an active role in STMA. She currently serves as President of the Colorado Chapter, and continues to maintain a standard of excellence in her work at Pleasant View Sports Complex. Once again, McNeal's efforts have earned her top honors, as the STMA has named Pleasant View its 1997 College Soccer Field of the Year.

McNeal is Turfgrass Manager of the facility. She says, "Pleasant View Sports Complex is state of the art. Owned and operated by the City of Boulder, the 54-acre complex features 30 acres of sand-based fields, including the award-winning field used by the University of Colorado's women's soccer team."

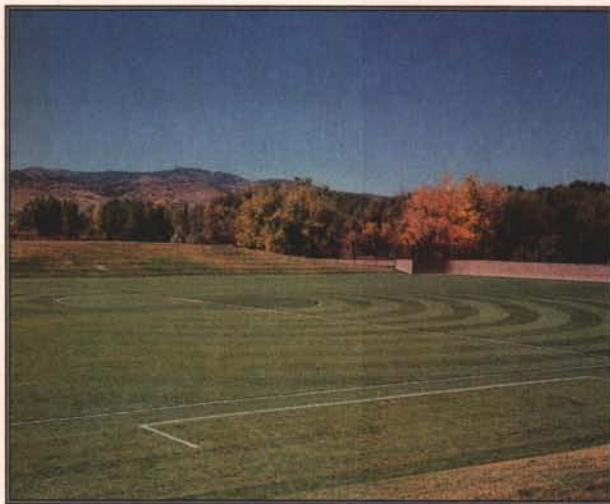
Construction of the original 21 acres of fields began early in 1994, and the initial seeding was completed that fall. These fields opened for play in August 1995. The complex added an additional nine acres of fields between

"All 30 acres of playing fields have a three-inch layer of pea gravel with an Eljen sub-drainage system," explains McNeal. "It's a rockless French drain that uses four-inch plastic perforated drain pipe placed in a herringbone pattern 25 feet on center. At least that's how the 'as-builts' are presented. Actual layout of the original 21 acres is about 75 percent true to the 'as-builts'. We've been remapping the field's underground system as it's discovered."

"The drainage layer is covered by an eight-inch layer of sand-based media. On the award-winning field and the other fields in the first construction, that mix is 90-percent sand and 10-percent Dakota Sedge Peat. The nine acres of new fields are 100-percent sand. The sand is from a local source and meets the specifications for golf course greens construction."

One and a half acres of turf and landscape border the fields, and the facility includes a paved parking area that accommodates 415 cars. The only

building on the property is a combination restroom facility/small office and storage compound. There's also a fenced, graveled, outdoor equipment storage area adjacent to the compound.



Beautifully set in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, Pleasant View Sports Complex, Boulder, CO, earned top honors as STMA's College Soccer Field of the Year. Courtesy: Abby McNeal

fall 1996 and summer 1997. In-house crews installed the sub-drainage and irrigation system, and RBI completed the final grading and seeding. Crews completed construction in time to meet the deadline for a June 1998 tournament.

McNeal says, "We have an MRI 5000F irrigation system with a 50-station Motorola controller. We use Toro 2001 heads in the sand-based turf areas, and Toro Super 700 and pop-up heads cover the surrounding turf and landscape areas. The drip system irrigates the 45 tree-filled islands in the parking lot.

"For full-circle coverage at 100-percent of the evapotranspiration (ET) rate, field irrigation takes 3-1/2 hours with each part-circle head running for five minutes, and each full-circle head for 10 minutes. The five- and 10-minute timing makes it easier to calculate the amount of water put down and to adjust zones for additional irrigation. It takes another 1-1/2 hours of irrigation for the outside landscaping.

"To shift high-traffic wear, we alternate the field orientation during the year. In the spring, we lay out nine fields (one rugby and eight soccer) in an east to west grid. In the fall, we go to eight fields (one rugby and seven soccer) in a north to south grid. Because of this, few of the irrigation zones are consistent with field layout.

"The city water mainline runs around the facility on the bordering edges. Our irrigation system is looped



Turfgrass Manager Abby McNeal currently serves as president of the Colorado STMA. *Courtesy: Ray Fidler*

with two points of connection and no pump. Quick couplers are spaced along this mainline, so we could have up to 300 feet of hose to drag to spot

water sections of the fields. With the city water system, we have pressure fluctuations depending on the demands on the system. So we can have problems achieving head-to-head coverage, resulting in donuts of dry spots eight to 10 feet around the heads. The donuts require what my boss calls 'foot watering.' You put your foot on the sprinkler head to force the water into the dry spot. It's faster and less labor-intensive than dragging the hoses. We work with different nozzle configurations to improve coverage. Trouble spots also receive extra aeration, slit seeding, and topdressing."

The complex is not fenced in and has no windbreaks. Heat and desiccation put added strain on the irrigation system.

McNeal says, "Play and practices fill the fields regularly, but unauthorized use still occurs. Rules and regulations are posted, but the size of the complex makes enforcement difficult. There's a gate at the parking lot entrance that is closed when the facility is not open. But the other three sides are exposed, and two are

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bordered by community roads, so people can just park and walk in. These unauthorized users are the least respectful of the facility and cause the greatest damage. To discourage unauthorized use, we remove soccer goals in the summer, resetting them only for scheduled play. Goals are removed and stored at the close of fall play. Vandalism, though not severe, is an on-going problem with the unfenced complex."

McNeal was hired in April 1995. At that time the facility had fields, but no office, restrooms, or equipment. Her boss is Dave Brown, golf course superintendent for the City of Boulder. Before Abby came on board, he handled both the course and the complex. Brown still does the purchasing, and he combines the needs of both facilities for cost savings. He coordinates special project needs with other city personnel.

Ray Fidler is classified as a part-time maintenance staff member. He and McNeal developed maintenance

methods that put most procedures in the one-person or two-person category. Their commitment, flexibility, and



Taken four months into the spring season, this picture illustrates the excellent condition of Pleasant View's fields. Courtesy: Abby McNeal

mutual respect help them manage the workload.

A seasonal, part-time worker helps in the summer. McNeal and Fidler concentrate their efforts on the fields and work their way to the outer turf and landscape. The third person tack-

les such tasks as weeding flower beds and pruning shrubbery. McNeal and Fidler focus additional maintenance on the high-traffic areas: goal mouths, penalty areas, sidelines, field centers, and spots needing repair.

Always on the lookout for better techniques, they're experimenting with Crown III Crushed Rubber. They've been topdressing a 1/8-in. layer of the recycled material in three different goal mouths and along three different sidelines on the established turf. They mix Zeopro in their divot mix to speed germination and establishment, and they add Primo to the line paint to slow upward turf growth and extend the painting interval from 10 to 14 days.

A polymer-coated, slow-release fertilizer with a one-to-one ratio of nitrogen and potassium generally carries the complex for 12 weeks following mid-June application. Soil tests at least three times a year help identify fertility problems and allow McNeal to fine-tune the program to counteract them.

Continued on pg. 14



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The new 100-percent sand fields do require maintenance adjustments. They need a bit more fertilizer to build up the organics in the profile.

In 1997, the crew core aerified the fields in July, and then sliced in the spring and fall. Topdressing media matches the soil profile.

All of the fields were initially seeded with a mix of five bluegrass vari-

eties and five perennial ryegrass varieties. McNeal uses the same ratio for overseeding, though she varies the varieties within the mix according to performance and availability.

McNeal and Fidler are responsible for general and corrective maintenance on the complex's 10 to 12 pieces of equipment. They also serve as the first-response team for general facility care, such as plumbing problems in the restrooms.

Field use

"Colorado's temperate climate allows regular field usage from March up to Thanksgiving," explains McNeal. "Each year they want to play earlier. Our first 1998 event was February 28."

Field use is scheduled in three categories: adult, youth, and collegiate. The adult league has competitive and recreational teams which play 380 games during two eight-week seasons.

The youth league is primarily competitive. Teams play two ten-week, 700-game seasons.

The University of Colorado NCAA Division I women's soccer team uses the fields from August to November. They hold three-hour practices four days a week and play up to nine home games on the championship field.

Pleasant View also hosts two eight-week youth soccer camps during the summer, and each averages 50 participants. Up to six summer tournaments bring in 1,000 more field users at all levels of play. In 1998, Pleasant View will host the Triple-Crown Youth National Playoffs.

Rugby adds to the facility's busy schedule. The Boulder Rugby Club holds two practices a week for approximately six months, and plays 17 home games during the year. In 1997, the complex hosted several semi-professional team competitions and the three-day All-Star Collegiate Rugby Tournament.

In 1997, Pleasant View also hosted a three-day Ultimate Frisbee tournament and a EuroCross cross-country race. McNeal says, "Field use is by permit only and is scheduled by the City's Recreation Supervisor, Teri Olander. As Turfgrass Manager, I am able to influence what usage the fields can handle. Teri and I work closely together on both long-term and day-to-day scheduling. I make the call if it's too wet to play, but I've done that less than 10 times in three years. I occasionally may cancel morning games only for league play."

"This complex is maxed out for space. If we had a facility twice this size, it might be enough to meet the needs of the community. We focus on excellence, on providing safe, highly playable fields by doing the best with what we have and putting in that extra effort each day." □

Bob Tracinski is business communications manager for John Deere Worldwide Commercial & Consumer Equipment Division in Raleigh, NC. He is public relations co-chair for the national Sports Turf Managers Association.


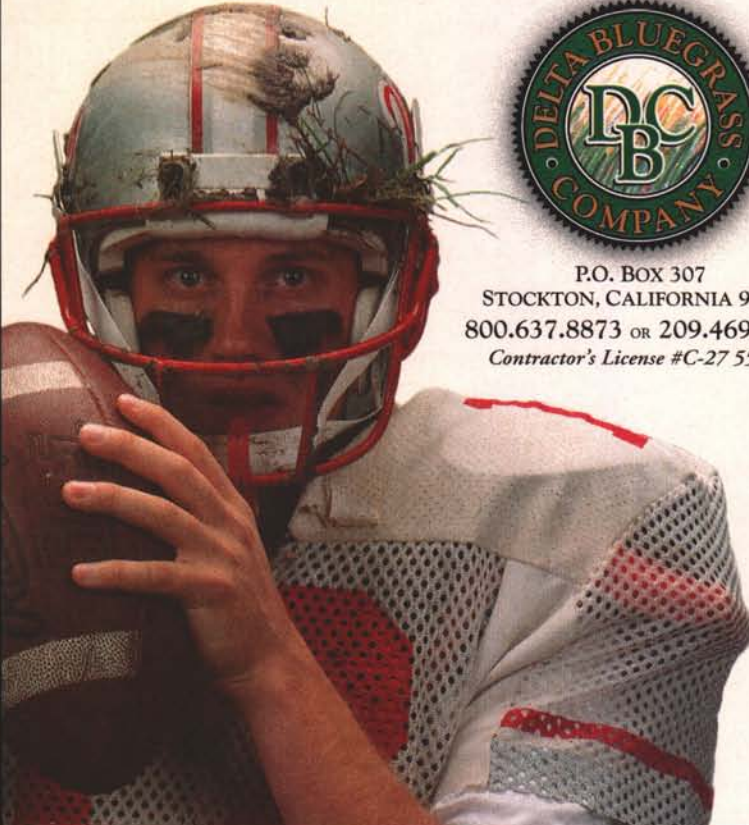
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