

Al Worthington Stadium

College Baseball Diamond of the Year

by Bob Tracinski

The field of Al Worthington Stadium on the campus of Liberty University, a private, Christian, liberal arts college in Lynchburg, Virginia, earned the STMA / sportsTURF / Beam Clay 1997 College Baseball Diamond of the Year Award.

The field was built in 1979, and in 1986 it was named for Worthington, a former major leaguer and long-time coach. The field's award winning status can be credited to the joint efforts of the athletic department administration, Grounds Manager Randy Johnson, Assistant Baseball Coach Dave Pastors, and a dedicated maintenance crew.

As grounds manager within the university's Facilities Department, Johnson is responsible for the entire campus outside of the buildings - from the parking lots to the athletic fields. Johnson says, "The baseball field had been built the year before I started at the university, so I didn't see the construction, but I have seen all the improvements. The field has a native-soil profile. They removed the existing top soil during construction and then incorporated it back into the soil mix that tops the field. There is no underlying drainage system, but internal drainage is adequate and the field has a one-percent slope that provides good surface drainage."

Liberty University has a broad sports program with multiple athletic venues. All of its facilities are used extensively. The university baseball team has a four- to six-week schedule of practices and intrasquad games starting in late August. The spring season begins in mid February and

runs through May, with practices and approximately 30 games played on the field. Local high schools use the field for an additional 20 games during the spring season.

In the summer, the local American Legion team holds its practices and home games there, and it's used for multiple summer camps. The field also hosts such events as Easter church services and the Independence Day fireworks celebration.

Assistant Baseball Coach Pastors came to Liberty University in 1987. He says, "Randy and his grounds crew were doing a good job with the field, only the 'player's touch' was missing. I started pointing out a few things, and they picked up on them right away. In 1991, we began rotating onto the daily maintenance crew players who had put in their four years of play, but were completing their degree program.

"During the 1992-1993 season, Brock Van Faussien, a student concentrating on sports turf management, joined the crew. As Brock gained experience, he became the head baseball groundskeeper, which alleviated my need to supervise daily maintenance. Brock earned his degree here. He's now in the graduate program at Clemson University and is working with the fields there. Mike Nicholas, who worked with Brock for three years, is now a senior and has stepped up to head the crew. We plan to continue that kind of progression."

Johnson's staff of six to seven full-time personnel expands to 20 during the growing season. About half of the crew is made up of students. Seven students work part-time on the baseball field, and as a group they average

between 100 and 120 hours per week. During the summer, crew size drops to two student employees.

Johnson says, "Designating this crew allowed us to raise the field level one more notch. They work closely with me and Coach Pastors. They do all the daily infield maintenance, and during the playing season they generally handle the mowing. My grounds-department staff tackles the more extensive cultural practices, and in the summer, more of the mowing."

Major maintenance projects and field repairs are scheduled October through December. From 30 to 60 tons of native river loam is added to the infield skin each year. The loam is tilled into the existing mix and leveled with a drag board, screen drag and hand rakes. Three to five tons of calcined clay is then spread over the top of the infield skin and worked in to provide the desired surface consistency.

The infield basepath is edged, and the field and bullpen pitcher's mounds are rebuilt, along with the batter's box area. Up to 60 tons of native arch marble, the base material for the warning track, is added each year. The material is worked in and the surface leveled. The grounds crew also tackles such tasks as sprinkler-head height adjustments, and they repair hoses and the batting tunnel and screen.

Johnson explains, "Initially, the field was sprigged with MidIron hybrid bermudagrass, a very cold-tolerant, very tough variety that stands up to the weather extremes at the upper edge of the transition zone. Because MidIron is not fast-growing and doesn't fill in quickly, we spread



The STMA, *sportsTURF* and Beam Clay introduce the 1997 College Baseball Diamond of the Year: the field of Al Worthington Stadium on the campus of Liberty University.

Courtesy: Brock Van Faussien

plugs of Vamont bermudagrass each June, then slice and mat drag it in.

"We also sprig Vamont into the high wear areas. The Vamont plugs are pulled from our other fields to cut expenses. This provides a thicker bermudagrass base and a better look to the field. But during the harshest winters, we lose some, or even all of the Vamont."

In early October, the field is core aerated in four directions. It's overseeded with a blend of perennial ryegrasses and one bluegrass cultivar. The crew applies seed at a rate of six lbs. per 1000 sq.ft. using a drill seeder. They set the blades at a one-inch depth and cross the field at 30-degree angles. They drag in the cores and thatch, and remove excess material once the young plants emerge.

Johnson notes, "We don't try to phase out the cool-season grasses, because we need to keep all of our options open for active growth in fall and spring. Our bermudagrasses don't begin active growth until mid to late May in a 'normal' year.

"We mow almost every day during the growing season, using a triplex reel mower. We alternate directions at each mowing, and change the patterns frequently to keep the turf upright. Mowing height for play ranges between 1-1/4 and 1-1/2 inches. If growth patterns allow, we drop to one-inch for a week or so once play ends to encourage the bermudagrasses."

As a private school with a 'somewhat limited' budget, the field-care program must look to outside sources - not only for the 'extras,' but also for many of the necessities. Johnson notes that some of the coaching staff and former players with time in the Major Leagues have made significant dona-

tions to the program, and both alumni and community support is strong.

Features have been incorporated to reduce both wear and maintenance. A drag path runs from the storage area onto the third base side of the field. Practice pitching mounds, installed along the right and left field fences, duplicate the slope of the on-field mound and help minimize wear.

Conveyor belt pieces placed in the batter's boxes prevent holes. 'Carpeted' fungo circles, on deck circles, coaching boxes, and the circle around home-plate further cut maintenance.

Johnson says, "Work has begun on a new baseball team restroom, coaching area and indoor batting cages. We're also planning for an enclosed pitcher's bullpen." Obviously, keeping

Q: What do all of these teams have in common?

Oakland A's
 Arizona Diamondbacks
 University of Texas Longhorns
 San Diego Chargers
 University of Southern California Trojans
 California Angels
 Arizona State University Sun Devils
 San Francisco 49'ers
 San Diego State University Aztecs
 San Francisco Giants
 San Diego Padres
 Los Angeles Dodgers
 Oakland Raiders
 Arizona Cardinals

A: They are at "HOME" on West Coast Turf!

**WEST COAST
 TURF**

GROWERS AND
 INSTALLERS OF
 PREMIUM QUALITY
 SOD AND STOLONS

P.O. Box 4563, Palm Desert, CA 92261 (800) 447-1840

Call 1(800) 817-1889 use *FastFax* # 1140598 and/or Circle 114 on Postage Free Card

top fields up to speed is an ongoing process.

Johnson adds, "To maintain any good facility takes a good working relationship between the end user and the care providers. We have that here, especially with baseball. They understand that what we do makes a difference and they appreciate it. The Al Worthington Stadium field is very important to them and it's very important to us."

Coach Pastors adds, "Success builds on itself. Each time field conditions improved, that became the standard to build beyond. The award and the recognition it brings present another set of challenges. To make the field worthy of the award, we need to maintain and exceed the standards met to receive it - and we're all dedicated to making that happen." □



Players take an active role in maintaining the award winning field. Many who are continuing their degree programs after completing four years of play join the daily maintenance crew to remain involved.

Courtesy: Brock Van Faussien

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

The Beam Clay Baseball Diamond of the Year Awards are sponsored by the Sports Turf Managers Association, sportsTURF Magazine, and Beam Clay. This is the 12th year the Beam Clay Awards have been presented. Each year, four Major League groundskeepers serve as judges. This year's judges were: Tom Farrell, Toronto Blue Jays (AL-East); Barney Lopas, Anaheim Angels (NL-West); Ralph Frangipani, Philadelphia Phillies (NL-East); and Eric Hansen, Los Angeles Dodgers (NL-West).

Beacon Ballfields The Groundskeeper's Choice



Beacon is the choice of groundskeepers everywhere. Our catalog contains everything for maintaining and equipping baseball, softball, soccer, and football fields.

- grooming equipment
- windscreens, netting, & padding
- bases & plates
- field marking & layout tools
- drags & harrows
- soil additives
- water removal equipment

Visit our web site:
www.ballfields.com



For a **FREE**
34-page catalog,
call: **800-747-5985**

P.O. Box 45557 • Madison, WI 53744-5557

LAS VEGAS ROCK, INC.



Las Vegas Rock, Inc. "Home of **Vegas Infield Mix** and **Aquarius Soil**, materials that will give you quality playing fields.

"**Vegas Infield Mix**" provides greater bail to surface contrast, water dispersment, increased playing days with low cost maintenance.

"**Aquarius Soil**", top soil that is free of contaminates, low PH factors with an ability not to load up with salts. Moves, yet retains water and fertilizer, cuts your watering costs. Additional information available, please contact Frank Spero at (702) 791-7625.

Plan of Attack

The basic maintenance plan

Fertilization: The fertilization program and pH adjustments are based on soil test results. Soil testing is done every three years. If problems arise, testing is done annually.

Fall fertilization is done three times a year, in September, October and November. The crew uses a 30% slow-release, complete fertilizer. They spread a total of 4 lbs. of N per 1000 sq.ft. per year. Spring fertilization is done in March at the rate of 1/2 lb. of N per 1000 sq.ft.

During the summer, light applications of nitrogen are used to encourage the bermudagrasses.

Aeration: Core aeration is performed once a month from April through November. The crew covers the field in at least two directions each time. They verticut once each summer, and use deep tine aeration every third year as compaction levels warrant.

Pest control: Split applications of Dimension herbicide for preemergent crabgrass control are used in conjunction with a three-way broadleaf herbicide, the first in March and

the second in May. The crew monitors for grubs and red thread, and uses IPM methods with control products only as needed.

Mound and skinned area standard maintenance

Daily procedures: The bullpen, practice and on-field pitching mounds are reconditioned, as are the batting boxes. The skinned area is dragged and watered, the warning track is dragged, and the infield turf bordering skinned areas is swept to prevent lip build-up.

Other procedures: Base lines and batter's boxes are chalked for each game; also, the bases, homeplate and the pitching rubbers are painted for each game; foul lines are painted as needed; and infield and warning track turf edges are edged monthly.



Out front cutting with baskets for clippings.



Attractive striping shows-off playing field.

Great Sports Striping At Superb Prices

- Light on your wallet – low initial cost and long life
- Great striping from the shearing reel cut of a National
- Smooth, clean cutting builds hardier, healthier turf
- Easier to sharpen and lower operating cost
- Easier to maintain than rotary riding mower
- Easy rear turning wheel for high maneuverability

For details call: (612) 646-4079



NATIONAL MOWER COMPANY

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



Groom 2-4 acres an hour with National Mower 70" Sports Turf Triplex

NATIONAL® is a Registered Trademark of National Mower Company

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

Call 1(800) 817-1889 use **FastFax # 1170598** and/or Circle 117 on Postage Free Card