

Flinn Memorial Stadium

Doubles Honors

by Bob Tracinski

Flinn Memorial Stadium, Quincy, IL, home of the Quincy High School Blue Devils, has become the first field to receive back to back STMA Field of the Year honors in two different categories. Named High School Football Field of the Year during the 1996-1997 season, Flinn repeats its award-winning performance as STMA's 1997-1998 High School Soccer Field of the Year.

The awards reflect the impressive achievements of Sports Turf Manager Kurt Knuf's maintenance program. When he came to the position in March 1985, Knuf found nothing but crabgrass growing on the field. Now, Flinn Memorial Stadium provides a source of pride for the city, and stands as the centerpiece of community activity.

Field use

Flinn's field easily earns the label "high-use." Boys' soccer plays 23 to 25 games on it in the fall, which have to be worked into an 11- to 13-game football schedule. The varsity and sophomore football teams also practice on it every Thursday night.

The marching band practices on the main field before the first home football game and before important competitions. They also perform for home varsity football games.

Girls soccer moves onto the field in the spring for 23 to 25 games. At the same time, the boys' and girls' track teams begin practices and meets.

Flinn hosted a Class A Sectional soccer game in November 1997. It brought in four teams for a two-game Thursday match-up and a Saturday playoff.

The following Tuesday, Flinn hosted its first Class A Super Sectional, the finals of the first round of the state soccer tournament. By that time, the field had already hosted 31 games and an 11-school marching band competition.

"We had two teams in the sectionals that hadn't played at Flinn before," Knuf explains. "As those players entered the stadium, they kept saying to each other: 'Look — they still have grass all over the field!'"

Special events

Flinn's field regularly hosts a variety of special events in addition to its packed sports schedule. Graduation ceremonies bring a stage, graduates, band members, dignitaries, and overflow crowd onto the field. Two thousand chairs filled the field in 1996, and the number increased to 3,000 in 1997.

In 1997, Quin hosted its first Relay for Life event to support the Cancer Society. Knuf says, "We had people at the field all night, with about 250 of them camping out. I set up an area outside the fence of the main field for the tents and painted 45 rectangles, each 20 feet by 30 feet, and numbered each one so everyone had a campsite they could identify. Then I painted outlines of a road between them to keep everything orderly."

Other regular events include the Special Olympics, a Catholic grade school's field day that involves about 1,000 people in the spring, and the Golden Games for seniors each fall. Knuf also gets requests each summer from people who want to run the track. He says, "I always tell them 'Sure — as long as I don't have to run with you.'"

Knuf goes on to say, "We're still hoping to bring the Illinois High School Class A Soccer Tournament Finals here. They're already booked for 1998 and 1999, so now we're shooting for 2000 and 2001. That would bring eight teams here. This is such a great facility, we'd like to share it with even more people."

Maintenance routine

Consistency is a major factor in the field's winning condition. Knuf has fine-tuned the maintenance program over the years. He monitors conditions constantly, but follows the philosophy: "if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Knuf handles the operation himself most of the year, but generally brings in two assistants between the end of May and mid-August. They help with the mowing, general clean up, and selected procedures.

Even the part-time staff was curtailed this year. One assistant left in mid-June because of a family emergency; the other left for college the first week of August. That left five football and two soccer fields to measure and paint in six working days before fall

practices started. Of course, Mother Nature threw in some rain to make things interesting.

Knuf found a way to get it done. He says, "I did add an application of Par Ex 32-3-8 in mid-June to compensate for all the spring rains. That extra boost helped the field hold up through the four inches of rain that fell during the first 10 days of July.

"We really cut down on irrigation, and it's in heavy rains that this field's

construction really shines. One day we had 2.6 inches of rain between midnight and 10:30 am, but I could mow by noon."

Knuf acknowledges that there are challenges to maintaining his sand-based field. Fertilization and irrigation needs are greater, and so are disease invasions. Knuf uses a combination of cultural practices as the first line of defense. He maintains a standard IPM program, but chemical controls are used only as needed.

The field's turf is 60-percent bluegrass/40-percent perennial rye, and it contains several cultivars of each. Knuf mows the fields three times a week, hitting the soccer/football game field each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday with a reel mower to etch a pattern.

Traditionally, the only visible wear occurs where the football players stand along the sidelines. Knuf overseeds that area weekly during the fall, and he closely monitors wear at the soccer goal mouths, the football goal line, and the area between the football hashmarks. Only the goal mouths need overseeding for girls' soccer play in the spring.

Knuf schedules the majority of field irrigation at night. The system kicks in around 2:00 am, when winds and evaporation rates are favorable.

The game field is very open, and constant, but ever-shifting winds alter the irrigation pattern. Knuf even notes wind velocity in his daily maintenance log. He controls isolated dry spots with two oscillating sprinklers and up to 400 feet of hose.

The practice field has no irrigation system. Knuf sets up Nelson rain trains as needed. This year, he didn't need the rain trains or the oscillators until mid-July.

He aerates the native-soil fields three times each summer with a combination of core and slice aeration. After core aeration, Knuf drags the cores into the turf with a section of chain-link fencing. The fencing collects excess debris for easy disposal. He uses a pull-behind sweeper attachment to pick up divots in the fall. He's never had to dethatch.

Fields are fertilized three times a year: when growth starts in the spring, when it begins to slow in early August, and then late in the season.

Understandably, Knuf is proud of his field. He says, "The satisfaction of providing top-level turf that players, coaches, officials, and spectators all rave about more than makes up for the hard work and long hours. I wish every high school athlete could play on fields like this one." □

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.

YOU COULD BE HONORED BY THE PROS!

Why not enter your baseball field in the Beam Clay® Baseball Diamond of the Year Awards contest? You need not be a customer, member, or subscriber; and there is no entry fee. You could be featured in sportsTURF magazine and receive an official awards plaque.

The Awards are sponsored by Beam Clay®, sportsTURF magazine, and the Sports Turf Managers Assoc., in recognition of excellence and professionalism in maintaining outstanding, safe, professional quality baseball diamonds. Entries will be judged in three categories: professional diamonds; college diamonds; and school, municipal or park diamonds.

Send the information below to enter:

1. Age of baseball diamond (year of installation).
2. Geographic location (city and state).
3. Description of maintenance program.
4. Operating budget for baseball diamond.
5. Irrigation: None _____ Manual _____ Automatic _____
6. Total number of maintenance staff for field.
7. Does baseball field have lighting for night games?
8. Number of events on baseball diamond per year.
9. Types and number of events on diamond other than baseball?
10. How many months during the year is the field used?
11. Why you think this field is one of the best?
12. **IMPORTANT:** Send two sets of color slides or prints.

Deadline for entries: Entries must be postmarked no later than October 30. Selection of winners will be made by the Awards Committee of Four Major League Head Groundskeepers.

Mail entries to:
Beam Clay Awards
Kelsey Park
Great Meadows, NJ
07838

