

Pacesetter Park

1998 STMA Parks and Recreation Softball Field of the Year

by Bob Tracinski

Eight ball diamonds arranged in two quads highlight Pacesetter Park of the Sylvania Area Joint Recreation District, a mecca for competitive sports in northwest Ohio and STMA's 1998 Parks and Recreation Softball Field of the Year.

The sprawling facility also includes three soccer areas with space for 21 fields; three lacrosse fields; 38 acres of practice area; a 15,000-square foot fenced playground; two open-air picnic shelters; and a 3/4-mile paved biking/skating trail.

"Pacesetter Park is a great example of 'you build it and they will come,'" says Facilities and Maintenance Director Boyd (Rob) Montgomery. "When the site originally was selected, it was on the outskirts of a developing area. The first 69 acres purchased were basically farm fields nearly surrounded by other farm fields.

"Now it's the center of a booming area. The community has embraced the facility, our programs, and the sports opportunities it has opened for youth and adults."

Fields

All of the athletic fields are native soil. Montgomery explains, "The park's native soil isn't the best. On the original property, we had a section of wooded swampland, some spots of heavy blue clay, and at the far corner which borders mining



Courtesy: Sylvania Recreation



Courtesy: Sylvania Recreation

quarries we hit bedrock at a four-foot depth."

The majority of the complex's turf is Kentucky bluegrass. The newer of the two quads was seeded with a mix of 70-percent Kentucky bluegrass varieties and 30-percent perennial ryegrass varieties.

The original ball field quad has an in-ground drainage system set at a four-foot depth. It has tiling, but no fill material and no "socks" on the tile. The other quad features an improved system installed at a 20- to 24-inch depth, with tiling on 10-foot spacings set in stone backfill.

This spring, each of the original infield surfaces of fine limestone screenings were replaced with 23 tons of red crushed brick mixed with calcined clay. Though the original infields drained well and didn't puddle, the crushed limestone got mucky or soft following rains.

"We've only had one or two cancellations since the new surfaces were installed, and that was because it was raining at game time," notes Montgomery. "The new mix drains within an hour after all but the heaviest rains, and keeps a nice, firm base.

"Since 1997, Pacesetter has used Toro's Touchnet System that works off the Osmac satellite system," says Montgomery. "The irrigation system consists of six satellites that run 552 Toro 640

sports field heads, 179 V 1550 heads and 182 570 heads. We also have a lightning detection system (ESID) compete with four warning sirens."

Mounds

"Seven of our ball fields are 300 feet; one field is 225 feet. All eight are multi-purpose diamonds for play by both youth and adult leagues.

"Each field has base socket settings of 80, 70, 65, 60, and 50 feet. Because our fields are used for both softball and baseball, there are no true mounds. They have all-skinned infields with a small crowned area in the center, and a graduated slope down from there.

"Two years ago we developed an interchangeable mound system similar to the Hollywood base system to facilitate easy movement of the pitcher's mounds. We established pitcher's mound socket settings of 53, 50, 46, 40, 38, and 35 feet. The in-ground connectors are set 1/2 to 3/4 inch below the grade of the infield — deep enough so they're not exposed — and are covered with rubber base caps when not in use.



Facility and Maintenance Director Rob Montgomery receives Field of the Year honors from STMA President Steve Guise. Courtesy: STMA



Courtesy: Sylvania Recreation

"Previously, our crews spent from five to 20 minutes setting up the pitcher's mound, especially with the limestone infields. Now it's a two-minute job."

Teamwork

Pacesetter Park's ball field quads are in use every weekend between May 17 and October 3. Despite this intense schedule, only Montgomery and a full-time maintenance supervisor made up the year-round staff through 1998.

Montgomery added a second full-time

maintenance supervisor this year. The three-person team manages 16 to 17 part-time and seasonal crew members.

Montgomery says, "Many people come back year after year, so much of our crew is experienced. All our crew members take pride in their work, doing those extra steps that show they've taken an ownership position."

Coordination and cooperation go hand in hand for Montgomery. He's established great working relationships with the city, township, and school district that have resulted in reciprocal arrangements on services and equipment use.

Maintenance

With the heavy native soil and extensive heavy field use, Montgomery has developed an aggressive program of maintenance and cultural practices to keep the fields in prime condition.

Key to the maintenance program is frequent, extensive aerification. To make the most of each aerification pass, Montgomery set up an aerifier with slicing tines on the side opposite the mounted coring tines, so the unit cores and slices at the same time.

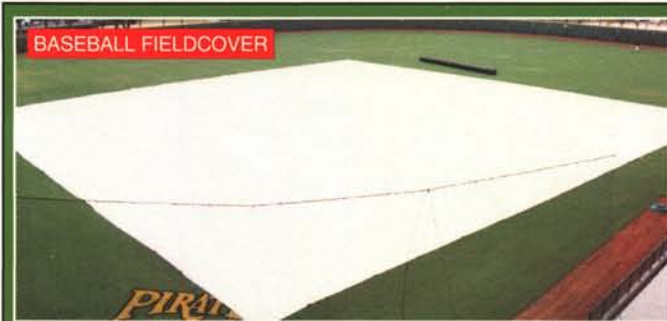
Crews cover the area in five or six

directions during early spring before play begins. They aerate again in June, August, September, and November, covering the area in four directions each time. During the playing season, the cores are vacuumed from the field. During non-playing periods, they're allowed to remain in place to decompose.

It's obvious Montgomery is proactive on sports turf management, always on the lookout for new information, ideas, and techniques. He says, "Things keep changing and you have to stay ahead of it. Part of that is taking advantage of educational opportunities; part is listening to the input from others, including your crews. Every step that increases efficiency or improves the quality of what we do, moves us that much closer to our goals."



Bob Tracinski is business communications manager for John Deere in Raleigh, NC. He is public relations co-chair for the National STMA.



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