

Lantana Sports Complex Field #1

STMA/Beam Clay/sportsTURF 1998 Municipal Baseball Diamond of the Year



Courtesy: Lantana Sports Complex

Lantana Sports Complex in Lantana, FL, earned top ranking in judging for the STMA/Beam Clay/sportsTURF 1998 Municipal Baseball Diamond of the Year for its appropriately named Field #1. The 380-foot baseball field is the pride of a facility that includes a 300-foot, skimmed, multi-purpose baseball field; a regulation soccer field; a T-ball field; three Little League fields; and two basketball courts.

Award-winning crew

Sports Complex Director Dan Reidy's crew is made up of Maintenance Foreman Anthony Chapman, and Crew Members Arnaldo Aponte and Charles Pagan. Rookie Steve Jacaruso recently joined the team.

Reidy explains, "We took a group of people who had experience in other forms of landscape maintenance, but not much experience in athletic turf, and started a four-month program of intensive learning. I'd worked for a while on a golf course in New York, but that didn't help much with Florida turf or baseball clay."

"We attended sports turf seminars, and drew on the expertise of such industry pros as Floyd Perry, Murray Cook, Alan Sigwardt, John Mascaro, and renowned area turfgrass educator, Joe Konwinski.

"We tapped into the resources of the Sports Turf Managers Association, and we worked gratis at a number of facilities, exchanging our labor for the opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge of

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Courtesy: Lantana Sports Complex

their programs and procedures. We learned who did what, when, and how, and what equipment they used, so we could be prepared not only to take on the maintenance of the sports complex, but also to purchase what we needed to handle that maintenance."

Forman Chapman stresses the importance of continuing education and team unity: "We're all continuing to read everything we can on sports turf and taking advantage of as many seminars and training sessions as possible. We're all committed to making this facility the best it can be."

Field #1

The basic composition of the entire site is "sugar sand." The very-fine, native sandy soil is typical in pockets of the southeast coast of Florida, and it provides excellent natural drainage. "It sucks down water as fast as we can put it on or the rains can deliver it," says Reidy.

This drainage comes at a cost of great instability. Reidy explains, "The fields were laser leveled during construction, and were sprigged with Tifton 419 Bermudagrass in 1996. Then the challenge of developing them into quality playing surfaces began.

"The sprigging machines, each piece of maintenance equipment, and even each footstep left its mark. It took a lot of time for the sprigs to grow together, despite our aggressive program of topdressing with an 80-percent sand / 20-percent peat mix, and rolling, irrigation, and fertilization."

Irrigation

When the Town of Lantana acquired the site from the state for development, the original well was part of the package. It hadn't been used for 30 years, and lurking within its water was iron bacteria that "wrecked havoc with all the irrigation valves, solenoids, and heads," says Reidy.

"It built up 1/2 inch thick in the pipe of the main irrigation lines and filtered throughout the system. It required removal of some of the pipe and nearly constant removal and cleaning of the heads, and replacement when the build-

up was too bad to clean again.

"It also meant a continual battle with dry spots due to irrigation pattern problems. A head would appear to be functioning adequately, but the rotation was not exact, so water delivery was uneven.

"A full well rehabilitation was undertaken in an attempt to solve the problem and had some success. In late March of 1999, a chemical injection system was installed that delivers polyphosphate into the system to suspend the iron and allow it to move through the heads and be dispersed with the water. There's not enough on-site history with this process to date to judge its effectiveness, but we're optimistic."

Even if the process works perfectly, every day will still bring an irrigation challenge. Chapman says, "We're one mile from the beach, so we get the full impact of ever-shifting winds. There's no consistent direction or even sequence of directions that would let us adjust our irrigation system to avoid wet and dry patterns. The only thing we can count on is that the wind will blow hard in some direction."

The outfield's automatic system consists of 38 Hunter I-40 heads in three zones. Seventeen I-20 heads irrigate the infield. A manual valve is used for the clay, and the infield turf is part of the automatic system.

Quick couplers are also available for

spot irrigation. The normal irrigation schedule is a 30-minute cycle daily during the hottest months, and a 40-minute cycle every other day during cooler months. The crew usually waters the infield clay lightly for 10 minutes once a day.

Lighting

Field #1's exceptionally well-designed lighting system consists of 62 Musco luminaries. Reidy says, "Containment of the lighting was essential, since the complex is located at the transition zone of business and residential development, directly adjacent to a busy, four-lane roadway on one side and the hospital on the other side.

"Shielding has been installed to further direct the light and virtually eliminate any spill-over that could cause problems for passing motorists or disturb hospital patients or area residents."

IPM

During grow-in and the tough first season, the fields contained enough weeds to "conduct a college-level weed identification class," notes Chapman. "You name it, we probably had it.

"Our IPM program at that point included aggressive spraying. Now we pull or spot spray if any weeds pop up.

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"Unfortunately, insects are an ongoing problem, since both fire ants and mole crickets thrive here. The lighted fields seem to act like a magnet for mole crickets. We follow an aggressive IPM program for these pests."

Maintenance scheduling

The crew uses slice and core aeration as needed. They perform each up to three times a year. "We drag the cores back into the outfield turf and pick them up in the

infield," says Chapman. "With our field profile, we need to balance stability and compaction. We'll bring the field almost to the saturation point and use the one-ton roller on the infield when conditions warrant it."

The crew overseeds the field's bermudagrass with a perennial ryegrass blend in late October or early November. The ryegrass starts phasing out in late March or early April. Reidy says, "The south Florida heat makes the transition



Courtesy: STMA

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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 do you think this field is one of the best?
12. **IMPORTANT:** Send two copies of entry and two identical sets of color photos.

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.

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back virtually trouble-free, with only a short period of uneven die out.

"The turf generally is mowed to a one-inch height, though they'll sometimes cut the infield down to 3/4 inch. A triplex reel mower is used in the outfield, and occasionally in the infield in a time crunch. Generally, a walk-behind reel mower is used for the infield.

"Mowing frequency is matched to turf growth. The crew gives Field #1 special attention, creating patterns, and whenever possible, double or triple mowing to get a more professional look."

Field improvements

Since the complex opened, the crew has installed Moundmaster bricks in front of the mound and in the batter's box to ease maintenance burdens.

They've also topped the infield clay with a layer of crimson stone. The brick-like composite improves aesthetics, helps absorb water, and eases maintenance requirements. Most importantly, it meets with player approval.

The crew has also used a coarse form of crimson stone on the warning track to cut maintenance there.

Field use

As a public facility, field use is extensive. More than 30 leagues play on the field over the course of the year. The field use schedule spans 10 months, and includes up to 400 games.

The fields are only closed to the public during August and January. This time is reserved for intensive maintenance procedures and special projects. It also brings a well-deserved rest for a #1 field that works as hard as its maintenance staff.



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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