Pro quality at the high school level

I am looking for information on renovating baseball and softball fields, specifically the grass areas in the infield and outfield. This is an existing field, which has not had much maintenance over the last few years. My biggest concern is that the ground is very lumpy and uneven and could be a stumbling or bad hop hazard. It presently has a very good stand of grass. I guess I'm wondering if topdressing would be an alternative?

Neil Olson
Sports Turf Manager
Community Schools, Boone, Iowa

I'm looking to buy a walking reel mower for my baseball infield, but all I can find are putting green mowers that won't mow taller than 1/2 inch. Got any suggestions?

Michael Krone
Director of Grounds
Missouri Baptist College

Bumpy fields for baseball and softball make you look bad as a grounds manager and certainly get the players and coaches wondering why they can't have a smooth field. There are many areas of the field that can become uneven and this could lead to dangerous trips and bad hops.

Lips can be a problem at any place on the field where the dirt area meets the grass. The dirt collects in the grass and a bump can build up so high that your infielder needs a latter to get the cutoff throw from left field to home (an actual complaint I heard from a coach). Poor dragging technique and wind are the biggest culprits in making lips. Most of you already know of this problem and have ways of dealing with lip prevention and renovation. Check the smoothness of the transition area between the dirt and grass by placing your heels in the infield area. You can be the smooth hero or the bumpy villain. This is a simple way to show that you really can manage a field just like the pros. Your goal is to get the infield as smooth as a pool table, or maybe a putting green. It is best if you have automatic irrigation because you will want to lower the mowing height to show off just how smooth the field is.

I'm wondering if you can smooth out all the depressions that are less than 3/4-inch deep. Another coring, topdressing and dragging may be needed to smooth the field to your desired expectation. A leveling drag made out of heavy angle iron can be used. Others have used four straight 4 by 4 by 10 square landscape posts with the corners of each post facing down to spread the sand. Depressions greater than 1 inch may need to be hand-filled with sand and smoothed. Two workers on each end of an aluminum concrete screed can level an infield in no time at all. Tape rebar rods to the aluminum screed if you need to add weight. A final drag with a flexible steel mat will give a smooth finish to your renovation. Seed and fertilize before and after topdressing to insure good coverage. Use the highest recommended rate for a new seeding. Seed can also be drilled or sliced into the final surface. Add water and get ready to mow. Mowing height for a premium cool season infield can range between 5/8 to 1 1/2 inches, while bermudagrass can tolerate heights from 3/8 to 3/4 inches.

So, if your infield is like a bumpy pasture, take a day and turn it into a smooth and fast surface. You can consider your project a success if the hitting coach "loves ya baby," but the pitching coach...well, just raise the mound for the pitching coach.

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