



Neighborhood Diamonds Get Brand New Shine

In October of 1997, Ball Park Franks commissioned a survey to determine what parents thought about the condition of community parks and the importance of these parks to their children. The results of that survey are alarming.

A sample of 1,000 adults nationwide with children between the ages of 6 and 11 was asked what they thought about the parks in their neighborhood, and 90 percent of the parents said they do not allow their children to play in a community baseball field or park close to their home. One of the major issues in this decision was the condition of park equipment and grounds (73 percent), which ranked higher than factors such as the age of the child, the location of the park and concerns about the activities of other park users.

While these parents expressed their displeasure over the state of the parks in their areas, they also recognized the importance of them to their children. More than 80 percent felt that places such as community ball fields and parks are important to the development of their children.

Shortly after the survey was taken, dozens of employees from the local Ball Park Brands plant in Philadelphia came together with area volunteers to help clean up a long-neglected neighborhood ball field in the city's Fairmount Park, launching the Ball Park Great American Clean-Up program. Since that time, clean-ups have been held in cities across the country, including Los Angeles, Cleveland, Denver, Boston and Minneapolis.

"We've been participating in this clean-up for several years now, and it's extremely rewarding and worthwhile every time," said Greg Sykes, President of Ball Park Brands. "Seeing what dedicated volunteers can do in a community is admirable. You get a true sense of how much time and effort citizens are willing to invest in their future."

This past spring, 130 volunteers gathered on a beautiful morning in Chicago to revitalize a field in Chicago's East Garfield Park. Comprised mostly of United Way volunteers and neighborhood families—including several little-leaguers—the group helped beautify the park by cleaning up trash, planting trees and flowers and improving the play lot. A new scoreboard was added for the baseball field, thanks to a grant from Ball Park.

"Through the 'Great American Clean-Up,' kids and their families in East Garfield Park will have another positive outlet and a clean, safe place to play ball," said Susan Norris, Director of Volunteer Initiative at United Way/Crusade of Mercy. "We're pleased to be involved in this worthwhile project that involves so many people coming together to benefit children and youth."

The fields chosen for renovation are selected on a year-by-year basis. Ball Park goes into large markets and solicits the help of the local United Way in finding a park that needs repair, then helps organize and fund the clean-up.

This is a great way to take a field that has fallen in disrepair and turn it into a safe, friendly and inviting destination for children. If you know of a field in your area that could use a serious makeover, or you are interested in offering your turf managing skills to this effort, send a letter to:

Ball Park Great American Clean-Up
432 N. Superior St.
Toledo, OH 43604

Michael SanFilippo
(847) 427-2083

Tip of the Month

Your Athletic Field and Your Child

Part I

by Floyd Perry

Question: What can be frozen, baked, trampled, starved, dehydrated, saturated, compacted, cut too short, not cut at all, overfed, underfed, sliced, probed, smothered, painted and kicked, and still survive?

Answer: Quality athletic turf grass

For the lawn maintenance company that crosses over and handles quality athletic turf on a contract basis, remember to treat your new baby (sports turf) just like your family lawn with time tested methods.

Two Work Forces

Some say that with the "Mow and Go" contractor there is a lack of caring and concern for the athletic property since most times it's a bid project and the low bidder bites the bullet to get the job. Some say with the hourly employee it's "I'll do the best I can, but leave the rest to someone else."

Let's reverse the issues. Let's be service oriented first. Let's assume that it's low bid, but high quality. Let's treat our low bid school project like a top end estate account and still stay within budget. Here are some easy ways of creating referral business, creating a professional image and leaving a lasting impression at the same time. Treat your athletic field like you would treat your child!

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First Things First

Soil test for pH, soluble salts, and in some areas water pH

You can't feed your new baby properly until the doctor gives you a correct formula to use, and the same is true with turf. At least once a year you should get a soil test. State this in your bid and supply the report when the test is completed to the school for their records.

Attempt to feed the sport turf controlled quantities of slow release nutrients rather than seeking immediate short term results—establish a balanced diet for your growing turf on a day-to-day, week-in and week-out basis. Make sure your fertilizer is a complete product with macronutrients in a slow—release shell to reduce your grass clippings and maintain a consistent appearance. You wouldn't feed your child 15 days of nutrients and then starve him for the rest of the month.

Issue a monthly results work calendar with each invoice.

Oxygen and water—you must open up the soil to aid in the continuation of quality root growth and added root strength, just as the doctor does to jump start your child at delivery.

Aeration of any nature is good—and the deeper the better in some cases—you want your turf to get good oxygen exchange. Core plugs, solid tine, spike, shatter and water injection are all forms of aeration. The time of year and playing practice schedules dictate the kind of implement to use.

Change the soil profile by using additional soil additives—sand, Turface or topsoil. Top dressing needs to be considered at least once a year, budget permitting. Not only does top dressing assist with microbial activity and water infiltration, but it also aids in maintaining a smooth playing surface.





Regulate irrigation so the turf roots receive required amounts of water; too much water can be hazardous, and weather conditions need to be monitored with water gauges and moisture sensors. ■

Be sure to read next month's column for part two of Floyd's article

Floyd Perry is author of three books: *The Pictorial Guides to Quality Groundskeeping: I—Covering the Bases; II—There Ain't No Rules; and III—Maintain it Easy, Keep It Safe.* He has also produced three videos: *The ABC's of Grounds Maintenance: Vol. 1, Softball; Vol. 2, Baseball; and Vol. 3, Soccer/Football Field Refurbishment.* He travels throughout the United States conducting workshops for men and women who maintain athletic fields. For more information about Perry's tips or other field maintenance questions, call: (800) 227-9381, or e-mail grounds@digital.net.

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