

# Middle School Doesn't Mean Middle Class

## M. S. Deal Stadium Earns Top Honors in Its Division

by Bob Tracinski

When asked to describe his groundskeeping philosophy, G. C. (George) Trivett, physical education teacher (with six classes), head football coach and athletic director for Granite Falls Middle School, Granite Falls, N.C., says, "We want the best conditions for everyone using our field. It all goes back to the total program, getting the best equipment we possibly can, working in all the maintenance we possibly can. If you have the dream and the commitment, you'll find the necessary knowledge and support out there waiting for you."

Those aren't empty words; he's proven it with actions. M. S. Deal Stadium captured the title of 1999 STMA/Beam Clay/*sportsTURF* Baseball Diamond of the Year in the School, Municipal or Park Division.

Tucked in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina, the stadium is in the transition zone with only cool-season turfgrasses growing just 30 miles to the northwest. Winter brings some snow and below zero temperatures but, generally, these conditions only last a few days. Average winter temperatures are near 50 degrees Fahrenheit, so field use may be year-round.

And use is an understatement for this multipurpose field. There are baseball practices and games, softball practices and games, soccer practices and games, football practices and games, all the outdoor physical education classes and the community sports programs.

The middle school baseball season begins on Feb. 15. Then come the American Legion program baseball games and the high school's tournament and playoffs, which could continue into mid-August, ending just in time for football practice to begin. Add soccer and sports play runs well into October.

In addition, the field has hosted a North Carolina state high school baseball championship, two North Carolina

state American Legion championships, two Region 10 National Junior College championships, numerous Division One college baseball games, several high school tournaments and many other high school, recreation and AAL baseball games.

And there's more. The stadium has just been awarded the first ever N.C. American Legion Championship Series which will involve nine teams in a double elimination tournament. With four games a day during the last part of July and first part of August, the series should be the biggest sporting event in the county, bringing between 2,000 and 3,000 attendees per day.

### Background

That's a lot of action for a field originally constructed of 2 to 3 feet of native soil, mostly hard-packed clay containing large amounts of old granite rock. M. S. Deal Stadium was part of the early 1940s high school facilities' development project. The facility became a middle school, serving grades six through eight, when a new high school was built in 1977.

Trivett joined the staff that year, having just earned his degree in Health and Physical Education at Appalachian State University. Groundskeeping wasn't part of his job description. The entire infield surface was skinned and the school's custodial staff mowed the remainder of the field with a Bushhog. Still, the field was superior to other area school fields and good enough to host the 1982 state baseball championship.

Trivett became interested in turf management in 1986 and he took over field care. He says, "I joined the Sports Turf Managers Association and began attending seminars, reading magazines and using the STMA membership roster to contact other field managers by phone and in person. I became a Certified Grounds Manager through the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS). I've attended many of Floyd Perry's seminars and also have spoken at some of them and at other seminars. As I learned more, I was able to accomplish more with the field." Trivett also is a certified pesticide applicator and a member of the N.C. Turfgrass Council and the Southern Turfgrass Association.

Field progress initially came in small steps. Adapting the fertilization program to soil testing results improved growing conditions. Marshaling P.E. classes to periodically clear away the ever-appearing granite rocks helped smooth the playing surface. Mowing moved to a flail mower, a rotary mower and now a triplex reel mower.

It took the negative influence of an inspection that condemned the field's old lighting system for Trivett to experience the power of volunteer support. When it was announced the lights wouldn't be replaced because the middle school didn't need a lighted field, the community consensus was yes, it did. Through donations and fund raising activities, \$43,000 was raised in just two months. The new Musco lighting system was installed in 1993.

Soon the booster club was in full gear, joined by other community supporters in raising funds for both team



Covered dugouts and press box keep players, team personnel and members of the media dry and comfortable.

Courtesy of G.C. Trivett

sports needs and field maintenance. The booster club runs the concession stands for all activities, with all proceeds channeled into the athletic department. Other volunteers provide game day on-field support. Trivett also credits progress to the support of the middle school administration and of the school system administration and the understanding of his personal support system, wife Karen and son Cory.

### Maintenance Program

Though he's had a part-time retiree or student assistant during some of his 23 years at the school, many years are like this one, and he tackles daily maintenance on his own. He's developed an aggressive maintenance program to keep the field in top shape. He core aerates once a month from May to September, using a double pass on the entire field, and a second double pass in high-use areas. The cores are dragged back in for topdressing.

For one aeration each year, the cores are collected and he topdresses using a local washed sand. In 1999, sand was used for the outfield while the infield was topdressed with calcined clay. This modification process has greatly improved water infiltration and percolation.

He says, "Generally we can take a 2-inch rain and still play within two hours. But when this heavy soil becomes saturated, infiltration is very slow. We'll apply calcined clay as needed for surface drying to keep from missing a game."

He mows the outfield at least three times a week; the infield daily and twice a day on game days. "The 13/16-inch mowing height helps phase out the perennial ryegrass in the spring and suits the bermudagrass during the summer. After overseeding in the fall, I gradually raise the height to 1-1/4 inches. I change our mowing patterns periodically," notes Trivett. "This spring it's an interlocking circular pattern. Next, I'll go to a diamond on the infield and the outfield. For football, I alternate directions every five yards to create a striping pattern."

Excessive wear is avoided by rotating all on-field practice sessions and drills and P.E. class workouts. Because the distance from home plate to the right outfield is 390 feet, Trivett has space to turn the football-soccer field at an angle to the

baseball field, further limiting wear. The thicker turf has virtually eliminated any weed or insect problems.

A field rake cuts infield grooming time. Trivett says, "During a tournament I can drag the field in four minutes. I'll drag between every game and after the teams take infield practice. We also change the bases between games, reline the infield, and rechalk the boxes. Our volunteer crew is great. We can be on and off the field in 12 minutes flat."

Good enough isn't the goal for Trivett, even with an award-winning field. Improvement is never-ending. The



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Courtesy of G.C. Trivett



In addition to hosting baseball, softball, football, and soccer games, the field is used for the school's physical education classes.

Courtesy of G.C. Trivett



Distinctive mowing patterns help give the field a professional appearance.

field had a 12-zone automatic sprinkler system. In October of 1999 a zone of seven automatic sprinkler heads was installed to irrigate the infield clay. This was tied into the old system along with a new computerized control. Previously, a hose was attached to a quick coupler for hand watering the infield. Trivett anticipates this will bring substantial time savings and allow for even better fine-tuning of infield moisture levels.

New infield soil and two tons of calcined clay were added to eliminate some low spots and level the basepaths. Though he liked the results, Trivett's already planning

ahead. He says, "We used a good natural clay soil. Next time we'll pay the extra costs for a screened, mixed soil to get an even better finish."

### Fertilizing

For the 2000 season, Trivett changed to ammonium sulphate fertilizer, attempting to eliminate the spring dead spot in the infield, which probably was caused in part by use of ammonium nitrate (34-0-0). He says, "The sulphate is producing a darker green color and also should help suppress the poa annua over a period of

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From left to right: Steve Guise, 1999 STMA President; G.C. Trivett, 1999 Dick Ericson Award recipient; Ross Kurcab, 1998 Dick Ericson Award recipient.

years. I start with 1/4 pound per 1,000 square feet in late winter and early spring because I'm phasing out the overseeded perennial ryegrasses. I'll raise that to 1 pound from June through September, to support bermudagrass growth. During late August, I also apply."

"Traditionally, I've applied 600 pounds of 10-20-20 fertilizer in late August to prepare for the perennial ryegrass overseeding in mid-September. This provides color and a good playing surface for early spring activity. But follow-

ing the input from some of the sessions at the January STMA Conference and my own observations, I'm debating that. As the perennial ryegrasses have become more aggressive and tougher to phase out, they've shaded and cooled the soil, slowing the green-up and root development of the bermudagrass base and weakening it. Our perennial ryegrasses may linger into mid-June or early July. Chemical elimination has shown only limited success. Though I appreciate the green spring turf, I'm considering going with dormant turf for spring of 2001 and monitoring the comparative bermudagrass reaction. We'll still have some color in the bermudagrass when football and soccer end in October."

G. C. Trivett was the 1999 recipient of the Dick Ericson Award, one of STMA's Founders Awards, the highest honors the association bestows upon their own. Fittingly, his nomination for the award came from the Granite Falls Middle School and ended noting these accomplishments: "His hard work and dedication, his enthusiasm for learning and his ability to implement and improve the awareness of turf management." 🏆

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