

FIELD OF THE YEAR



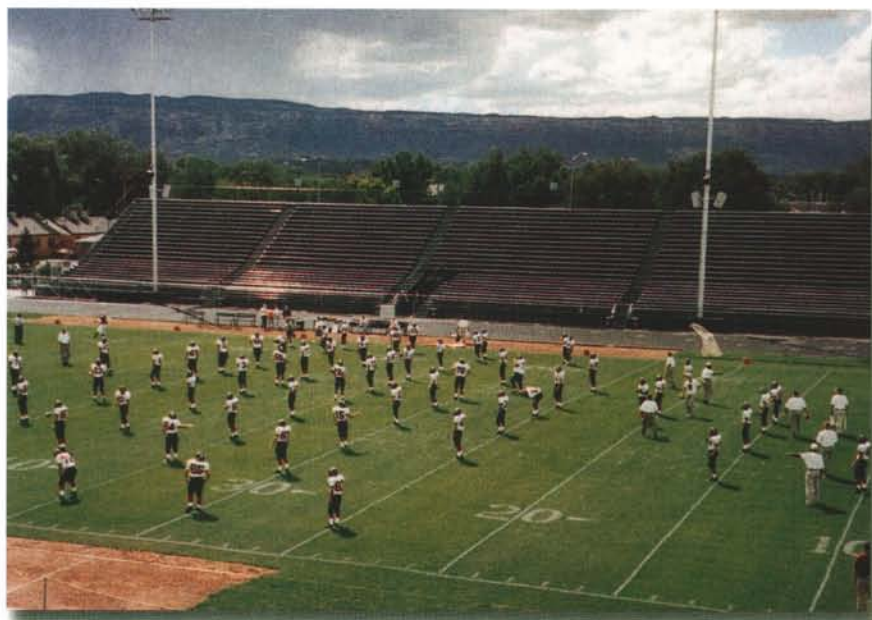
Stocker Stadium of the City of Grand Junction, Colo., Earns STMA 1999 Football Field of the Year Honors

by Bob Tracinski

While “It’s a circus around here,” may be an expression sports turf managers use to describe a hectic schedule, when Ron Felt says it, he really means it. Early each June, the Shrine Club Circus takes over the football field of the City of Grand Junction, Colo., Stocker Stadium.

Felt, sports maintenance supervisor for the city, says, “Football offensive linemen are big these days and do a tremendous amount of damage to a field. Imagine what five elephants can do. The Shrine Club Circus brings in its complete three-ring extravaganza, including five elephants, horses, lions, and tigers; the clowns and their little cars, a motorcycle act and much more. Spectators can ride on the elephants and horses and have their picture taken with a bear—all on the field.

“The Circus moves in at midnight on a Thursday night to set up for four



The groundscrew at Stocker Stadium is diligent in their efforts to provide the best possible playing surface. Courtesy: City of Grand Junction

performances—two on Friday and two on Saturday. They start tear down

immediately after the last performance and move out that night. We don’t cover the field, but we do use Portafloor to protect the track from the semi-trucks that drive onto the field. We also mark our irrigation lines with chalk to warn the circus workers to avoid them when they take the big axles off the vehicles and pound them three feet into the ground to serve as the anchor stakes for the rigging.”

The circus is just one of a packed season of events which put Stocker Stadium to the test. Tackling them successfully while providing superior playing conditions to its athletic field users earned Stocker Stadium the STMA 1999 Football Field of the Year honors in the Parks and Recreation Division.

Busy schedule

Felt says, “Our football season traditionally begins in late August. We’re



Former STMA President Steve Guise (right), presents the STMA Field of the Year Award to Ron Felt, sports maintenance supervisor for Grand Junction, Colo. Courtesy: STMA

The Maintenance Program



Late Winter/Early Spring Field Cover

Center of field remains under turf blanket with soil temperatures monitored every other day. When temperatures stay consistent at 41 degrees F, the cover is removed in the morning and put back in the evening.

Following one week of this process, the cover will be removed for the season.

Spring Start Up

Take soil tests throughout field. Send to consultant for analysis and recommen-

dations of fertilization requirements

Maintain turf at off-season height of 2-1/2 inches with 60-inch rotary mower

Check irrigation system for proper operation and make necessary repairs

Activate irrigation system approximate-

the home field for four area high schools and RMAC member Mesa State College. We can count on at least one and possibly two high school teams making the playoffs in November. We may host the championship game on Thanksgiving weekend, depending on which schools make the finals. If the college team goes into the playoffs, our season could last into December.

"Football packs the schedule. The first weekend of October, one of our local teams had its Homecoming on Friday night. Then we hosted the Colorado West Band Competition from 10 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. on Saturday with each one of the 20 bands performing on field. Another high school game kicked off about an hour after the bands moved out. This year, our busiest football weekend falls at the end of October. The three middle school Super Bowls are Oct. 25, with the sixth graders playing at 4:00 p.m., the lightweights at 6 and the heavyweights at 8. That's followed by three high school games, one on Friday night, one Saturday afternoon and one Saturday night. Over 40 football games will be played on our field before the season winds down."

The field has little time for winter rest before the next round of activities. Track and field programs start in mid-February, using the football field and the eight-lane quarter mile track for practices and for local, regional and preliminary state track meets. Sixteen meets will be completed by the first week of May.

Just one week later, the graduations begin. Stocker Stadium hosts the graduation commencement ceremonies for the approximately 200 graduates at both of the area high schools and the 300 to 400 graduates



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The Maintenance Program

ly mid-March, irrigate as needed

Spring

Fertilize if soil tests warrant with ammonium sulphate at rate of 1/2 lb. N per 1,000 square feet

Shatter tine aerate

Post-Circus Field Repair

Monitor for disease activity

Increase irrigation

Core aerate with 1/2-inch tines in 2 different directions, remove cores

Apply high calcium lime at rate of 25 lb. per 1,000 square feet to reduce soluble salts and chloride levels, irrigate following application

Apply 20-5-20 slow release fertilizer at rate of 1/2 lb. N per 1,000 square feet

Pre-Football Preparation

Resod any heavily damaged turf areas

Overseed with 70 percent bluegrass/30 percent perennial ryegrass at rate of 3 lb. per 1,000 square feet applied in 2 different directions

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- Oct. 10 Pleasonton, CA
- Oct. 17 San Jose, CA
- Oct. 24 Fresno, CA
- Oct. 31 Bakersfield, CA
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Stadium staff prepared the field for its first football game just 93 days after sodding was completed. Courtesy: Grand Junction

of Mesa State College. The band, the stage and the folding chairs for the graduates are placed directly on the turf. The schools set up the stage and all the folding chairs the day before the event and do their practice runs, with the ceremonies and tear down on the following day.

A week or so after the high school commencements, the real three-ring circus moves in. At the end of June, Stocker Stadium hosts the Statewide Special Olympics track and field events.

Felt says, "All throughout the active spring period we attempt to limit compaction by keeping the field as dry as possible prior to the event, using irrigation only as necessary to alleviate turf stress. Our much-needed break runs from the first of July until football begins in August. It's our only window for extensive turf and facility maintenance."

Stocker Stadium originally was used as a football field in 1918 for Grand Junction High School. The native soil field was renovated and the east stands constructed in 1949. The west stands were added in 1957, raising the seating capacity to 5,100. The playing surface was renovated in 1977. A Musco lighting systems replaced the old system in 1983. The

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Topdress with material as close to existing root zone soil profile as possible

Begin gradual lowering of mowing height to 1-1/4-inch game height, switch to ride-on triplex reel mower as mowing height warrants

Deep tine aerate to deepest possible level

Monitor turf color, if needed apply

chelated iron at 2 oz. per 1,000 square feet prior to first game

Mark out field and paint prior to first game

Football Season Maintenance

Mow on Tuesday and Friday, more frequently if needed to maintain turf height at 1-1/4-inches, alternate mowing direc-

tion every 10 yards to stripe field

Paint field lines on Wednesday, reline for weekend games if needed

Change goal post cross bar as needed to accommodate high school and college level games

Irrigate as needed



Forty-seven days after the last roll of sod was laid the Shrine Club Circus came to town.
Courtesy: City of Grand Junction

Lincoln Park location also includes a premium baseball facility with seating for 9,000. The baseball facility is the home field for the four area high schools and Mesa State College and for league baseball throughout the summer. In addition, it hosts the National Junior College Association World Series each Memorial Day weekend. In 1994, a new locker room facility was constructed to accommodate both football and baseball.

Felt has served as Sports Maintenance Supervisor for the City of Grand Junction for 18 years. Along with the two athletic facilities at Lincoln Park, he also supervises the City's Canyon View facility with eight soccer fields, four softball fields in a quad arrangement and a baseball field, along with two softball fields at both Columbine and Pomona Parks. He notes, "It has been my goal, and the goal of the City, to provide the safest, most aesthetically pleasing playing fields for the players, fans and citizens of Grand Junction."

Bob Tracinski is the Business Communications Manager for the John Deere Worldwide Commercial & Consumer Equipment Division headquartered in Raleigh, N.C. He serves as public relations co-chair for the national Sports Turf Managers Association.

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