



Walking into a Career

Nearly a year and a half ago, Dave Walker went to Alexian Field in Schaumburg, Ill., home of the Northern League's Schaumburg Flyers, to apply for a position as a part-time game-day grounds assistant. He was hired, and spent the summer working under the tutelage of Head Groundskeeper Steve Erickson, formerly of the Triple A Iowa Cubs.

Walker, who at the time was studying law enforcement, had no experience caring for a baseball field. "I'm a huge sports fan, a die-hard Cubs fan, and I just thought it would be a fun thing to do," he said.

Walker's first season as a groundskeeper was also the Flyers' first season in Schaumburg. Alexian Field had been recently constructed for the independent Northern League Flyers, modeled after Chicago's Wrigley Field, with the same field dimensions and appearance from the outside. That year, players and crew grew accustomed to the field together.

When the 2000 season began, Walker, who had enjoyed his experience from the previous season, moved up to become a full-time staff member, where he planned to continue his hands-on education from Erickson. Three games into the season and all that changed.

Erickson was offered the position of head groundskeeper at PNC Park, the new, natural grass stadium opening in 2001 for the Pittsburgh Pirates, replacing Three Rivers Stadium. Schaumburg suddenly needed a head groundskeeper.

"I guess I was in the right place at the right time," said Walker.

Now Walker, 21, finds himself in charge of caring for the turf at a relatively high-profile field. While it doesn't get the attention of its major league cousins to the south, the 7,000-seat Alexian Field is almost always packed with families from the northern suburbs of Chicago who appreciate the comforts of a smaller park and the fan-friendly attitude of the Northern League.

He's not lacking help, however. Erickson is in contact with him at least once a week, and he has received plenty of advice from Roger Baird, head groundskeeper for the Chicago Cubs. And, as a new member of the STMA, he will have plenty of old turf pros willing to offer their advice. Most importantly, he knows he still has a lot to learn.

Walker no longer envisions a career in law enforcement. Like many of you, he has unexpectedly stumbled into a profession that he loves. He laughed, not winced, when he told me of rolling a wet tarp one morning with only seven people; he didn't flinch when he talked about working some days from 6 a.m. until midnight.

"It's a great feeling, being out on the diamond all day," he said. "I love being out there, mowing the grass, dragging the infield. The best part is getting the respect of the players, hearing them praise the field."

Congratulations, Dave. Welcome to the STMA.

Michael SanFilippo
(847) 882-1942

Tip of the Month

Aeration

by Art Wick, Lesco Inc.

Taken from "Athletic Field Turf Maintenance Handbook."

Athletic fields should be systematically aerated a minimum of three times per year. Heavy aeration (six to eight times over the area) in the spring prior to fertilization and/or overseeding is recommended followed by light aeration (one to three times) in late summer or early fall prior to fertilization. Aeration at these times should be followed by dragging with a chain drag or a section of chain-link fence.

At the close of the fall playing season, again aerate at the heavy rate but do not drag the area following aeration. By allowing the aeration holes to remain open, freezing and thawing of moisture in the holes will improve the effectiveness of aeration. Where a field is in constant use, it is sometimes necessary to give it additional aerations during the season. Where areas receive heavy and frequent use, light aeration every 10 days to two weeks during the playing season may be beneficial. A good rule to follow is to aerate whenever the turf begins to show the effects of soil compaction.

For more information on Lesco or the "Athletic Field Turf Maintenance Handbook," contact Lesco: 20005 Lake Rd, Rocky River, OH 44116-1545; 800-321-5325.