



Q&A **New Job on the Hill**

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Have Questions?

SEND THEM TO DAVE AT: ISU, HORTICULTURE DEPT., AMES, IA 50011

I recently became responsible for maintaining two little league baseball fields in town. Both fields are in pretty lousy shape—grass coverage is spotty, the field is uneven and rocky and the pitcher's mound is more of a small bump than a mound. What steps can I take this winter, when the ground is frozen and the field has snow cover, to get a head start on fixing these fields? And what should be my first steps once spring arrives?

Randy Grember
Stockton, Minn.

Randy, it's winter, so my best advice is head to Lake Mille Lacs, cut a hole in the ice, and jig for walleye with your favorite color of pimperl on one of Minnesota's finest lakes. I'll look for you there in early February and we can discuss the following plan of attack for your spring upgrade.

Every play starts with the pitcher so you might as well also start with the pitcher's mound. Plan on having a mound as good as Major League Baseball and you will really get off to a good start with the coach and players. Start with a waterproof tarp for the mound. During the season you will use the tarp to keep the proper amount of moisture in the mound while at the same time keeping excessive rain and erosion off of the mound. For your project cover the mound now, during the winter, with the intent that it will keep the mound drier and you can start your renovation earlier in the spring. There are several good descriptions for mound building;

Floyd Perry Pictorial Guides and "Sports Fields: A manual for Design, Construction and Maintenance" by Puhalla. The Turface Web site (www.profileproducts.com) has a good play-by-play description of mound building and repair in their sports field maintenance section under reconstruction.

Here are the basic steps for mound building. If you don't understand any of the steps then consult the publications sited above for more detail and tips on how to actually get the job done.

1. Equipment and materials include: square shovel, tamp, 12-foot 2"x4" or slope guide, 100-foot tape measure, landscape and claw rake, new rubber, pick, 2-foot carpenter's level, 4-foot 2"x4", wheelbarrow, large nail/spike, damp packing clay and carpenter's square.

2. Obtain proper distance, alignment and height. The rubber must be perpendicular with the line from the point of home plate through the center of second base. Use a transit level to locate the top of the rubber 10 inches above home plate. Be sure that the bases are properly located on the field before measuring the rubber distance.

3. Replace the rubber when worn. Four-sided rubbers can be turned and reused. If the previous placement of the rubber was proper then carefully remove the old rubber so that the new one can be put back into the same location. If relocating the rubber then place a solid concrete block under the rubber to keep it from shifting.

4. Locate the collar or circle of the mound. The diameter of the mound should be 18 feet and the center of the circle should be 18 inches in front of the rubber.

5. Build the Pitcher's Plateau. This is probably the most neglected part of the mound in baseball. As the pitcher steps back towards second base they should step onto a large level surface that is flush with the rubber. The pitcher's plateau is a 3'x5' rectangle that is level with the surface of the rubber. It is centered around the rubber starting 6 inches from the front of the rubber, leaving 24 inches behind the rubber. The 5-foot width gives a good range of motion for pitching from either side of the rubber and for moves to first and third.

6. Construct the Slope. The front slope provides a proper surface for the landing and follow-through foot. A slope guide can be purchased or made. The guide will assure that the mound slope starts 6 inches in front of the rubber and then falls 1 inch per linear foot toward home. For example, at 18 inches in front of the rubber the surface is one inch below the rubber, at 30 inches it is two inches below the rubber, etc. The working parts of the mound are usually right in front of the rubber and about 3 to 6 feet in front of the rubber where the pitcher lands.

7. Condition the Mound. As a last step spread a thin layer of calcined clay over the entire mound to keep the surface from becoming too sticky when wetted.

For the grass area of the infield it will need to be attacked in the spring or at the end of your playing season. Check out the Q&A from April 2000 for some ideas on smoothing the surface and improving the grass.

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