



Team Effort

Assembling the right team to build a new soccer complex is half the battle.

by Michael Oswald

The new Allen Creek Soccer Complex, a joint project between the City of Gainesville, GA, and Hall County, was built from Summer 1999 through Spring 2001. The nine-field facility—located in Gainesville, GA, about 40 miles Northeast of Atlanta—will be dedicated this month and play will begin this coming Fall. Once opened for play, youth soccer leagues and amateur adult soccer leagues will utilize the fields. Sports Turf Company, an athletic field construction and sod producing firm located in Whitesburg, GA, worked closely with the City of Gainesville, the architect, and several subcontractors to build the facility.

“The facility contains four big fields of 360x225 feet, and five smaller fields that measure 360x180 feet,” notes Aaron McWhorter, president of Sports Turf Company. “One of the fields is a stadium that seats 2,000, while the other eight fields will have temporary bleachers with 200- to 400-person capacities.”

McWhorter says construction was divided into two phases. The first phase involved clearing trees, heavy earth work, street curb and asphalt base installations, storm sewer work, erosion control, and building a well and a man-made lake for irrigation. In phase two, artificial lighting, landscaping, an irrigation system, a maintenance facility for field equipment, and three main buildings were installed. “One of the buildings has offices, concessions and restrooms in it,” he relates. “The offices for this complex are going to be staffed full-time, plus there’ll be a full-time field maintenance person with two part-time helpers. Both of the other two buildings contain only concession stands and restrooms.”

Phase one was completed in Spring 2000, and phase two was just finished this past April. Sports Turf Company was the general contractor during phase two, but the firm subcontracted for paving, landscaping, buildings and lighting systems. Sports Turf built the irrigation system, laid the concrete, installed the root zone, and did the laser grading and sodding. Sod on the fields, which was grown and installed by Sports Turf Company, is TifSport Bermudagrass. “We know from past experience that this sod does very well in this region of the country, and in this type of application,” McWhorter notes.

The root zone material for all the fields is 85% sand, and all fields are graded with a 1% slope. Though there are 16 acres of sod on the fields themselves, the total amount of sod installed (including field and non-field areas) was 1 million, 200,000 sq ft.

Choice

When asked how Sports Turf Company was selected for this complex, McWhorter explains that “The City of Gainesville pre-qualified sports field contractors in the area, then eliminated those that were not qualified, then asked the remaining companies to bid on the project. We came in as the low bidder, and were selected as the general contractor for the whole complex, as well as the sports field construction firm.”



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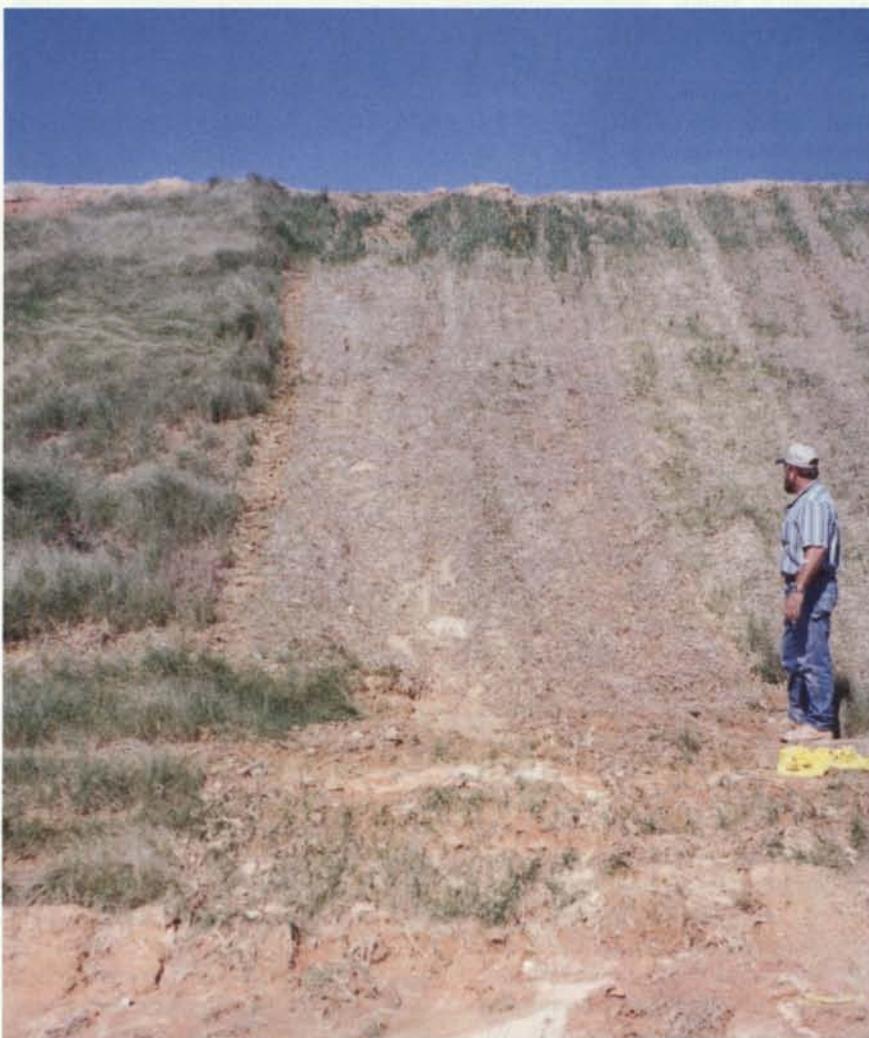
However, according to McWhorter, there are other qualities, such as experience, that made Sports Turf Company an attractive choice for Allen Creek. For instance, the company recently built a training facility for the NFL's Atlanta Falcons in Hall County, a complex that includes three outdoor football fields.

McWhorter says that building sports complexes is a different sort of animal than other types of construction. “The sequencing of the work is different than with other construction jobs,” he explains. “Laying the sod is that all-important last step, sort of like putting new carpet in a newly built house.”

“You wouldn't select a construction firm to build your family's new house that had never built houses before, right?” McWhorter continues. “When building sports facilities, it's all about the quality of the fields. It's not about the buildings, or the paving or the



Sports Turf Company subcontracted for paving, landscaping, buildings and lighting systems.



Severe elevation changes at the Allen Creek Soccer Complex site required thorough erosion management techniques, such as installing the right sod at the right slope on the hills between fields.

concession stands. Typical brick-and-mortar construction firms don't know this niche well enough."

Quality

"The design and construction of this new soccer complex is outstanding," McWhorter relates. "There are two key points that make Allen Creek great—the layout was well thought-out, and the focus was on the fields. Also, this is one of those rare municipal projects where they allocated enough money to make everything top-notch," he adds. "For example, the rootzone material alone cost around \$200,000."

McWhorter praises the architectural design firm—Moreland Altodelli & Associates, Gainesville, GA—for providing unusually easy access to the fields from the parking lots. "At most complexes," he relates, "there is one parking lot, and players and fans have to walk a long way to get to the right field. At Allen Creek, the parking lots, concessions and fields are interspersed so that getting to where you're going is simple."

The design firm came up with the layout of the complex, and worked closely with Sports Turf Company throughout the process to oversee any design modifications, and answer questions that came up along the way. "Every two weeks we'd hold a major construction meeting," McWhorter relates. "Meetings would include representatives from our company, the architectural design firm, each of the subcontractors, a city representative and a county representative. The meetings helped keep all parties well-informed about any issues that came up while work was underway."

Challenges

According to McWhorter, Georgia has the toughest erosion control regulations in the nation, and some of the tightest watering restrictions, both of which presented some special challenges during construction. "But these are challenges that we're accustomed to dealing with," he notes.

The design incorporated a detention pond to catch and release rainfall and eroded matter slowly, silt fences to capture erosion but permit water through, check dams for turbidity monitoring, and the installation of sod in all open areas to further control erosion.

"Turbidity restrictions require the installation of stream monitoring devices above and below the complex," McWhorter explains. "If there's rainfall, the site has to measure water turbidity within 45 minutes. The complex is allowed a certain downstream turbidity percentage increase when the measurements are taken, otherwise fines can be levied. Therefore, managing erosion was a critical issue for this project."

Knowing that watering restrictions could be a problem for a nine-field sports complex, the design included a man-made lake to feed the irrigation system. The firm also had an on-site well drilled which pumps water into the lake.

Also challenging were the severe elevation changes at the site. "The complex goes through about 130 feet of elevation change from one end to the other," McWhorter explains. "The fields are stepped, not all on the same level. This elevation change made it even more important that we manage erosion carefully, in part, by installing the right sod at the right slope on the hills between fields."

Tips

When asked if he has any suggestions for complex owners, design firms, sports turf managers, or others when it comes to building a new field, McWhorter says it's important to "keep the lines of communication open at all times, and to get the right team put together to begin with. For Allen Creek, the city had a representative on site during the entire construction process to answer questions. No matter how much planning you do, questions are inevitably going to come up."

McWhorter says having the right players in place is the most important step sports field owners can take. "If any member of the team is not experienced enough, or not on the same page, you're not going to meet the objectives of the project," he says. "The complex owner and the architectural firm have to select the right contractors and subcontractors. This means pre-qualifying the companies before they even reach the bidding process. Obviously, you want to maximize your money, but you're not necessarily required to take the lowest bid."

McWhorter refers to a new Georgia law (House Bill 1079), which has recently been adopted to allow governmental entities to accept bids or proposals. Under this updated Georgia law, giving the job to the lowest bidder is not always required. Other states may make similar allowances.

"For instance, we recently bid against a number of other firms for a high school track and football field," McWhorter relates. "The city threw out every bid because they were all too high. The city then selected the three most experienced firms, out of all of the firms that had bid, and said 'we have \$350,000 to spend, now let's see a proposal from each of you showing what you can do with that amount.' The city selected us for the job, but as you can see it was not done on a lowest-bid basis."

"If you make good decisions from the outset about who your construction team is made up of," McWhorter concludes, "the best fields for your dollar will be the end result." ■

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