

Olmsted Field of Westbrook, Maine

Earns STMA 2000 Football Field of the Year Honors

Dedication to excellence, focused management and plain old hard work earned Olmsted Field of the City of Westbrook, ME, the 2000 STMA Football Field of the Year Award in the High School/Parks and Recreation division. Olmsted Field is part of the 22 acres of playing fields within the city of Westbrook and under the maintenance program of sports field manager Lance Tibbetts. The fields are located throughout the city, at the elementary and middle schools, the high school, and in city parks.

The original Olmsted Field was developed at the city's high school in 1965. It was a traditional native soil field seeded with cool-season grasses and was used for football and band practices and for games. Tibbetts says, "As each year's football season progressed this field would have more exposed soil than turf.

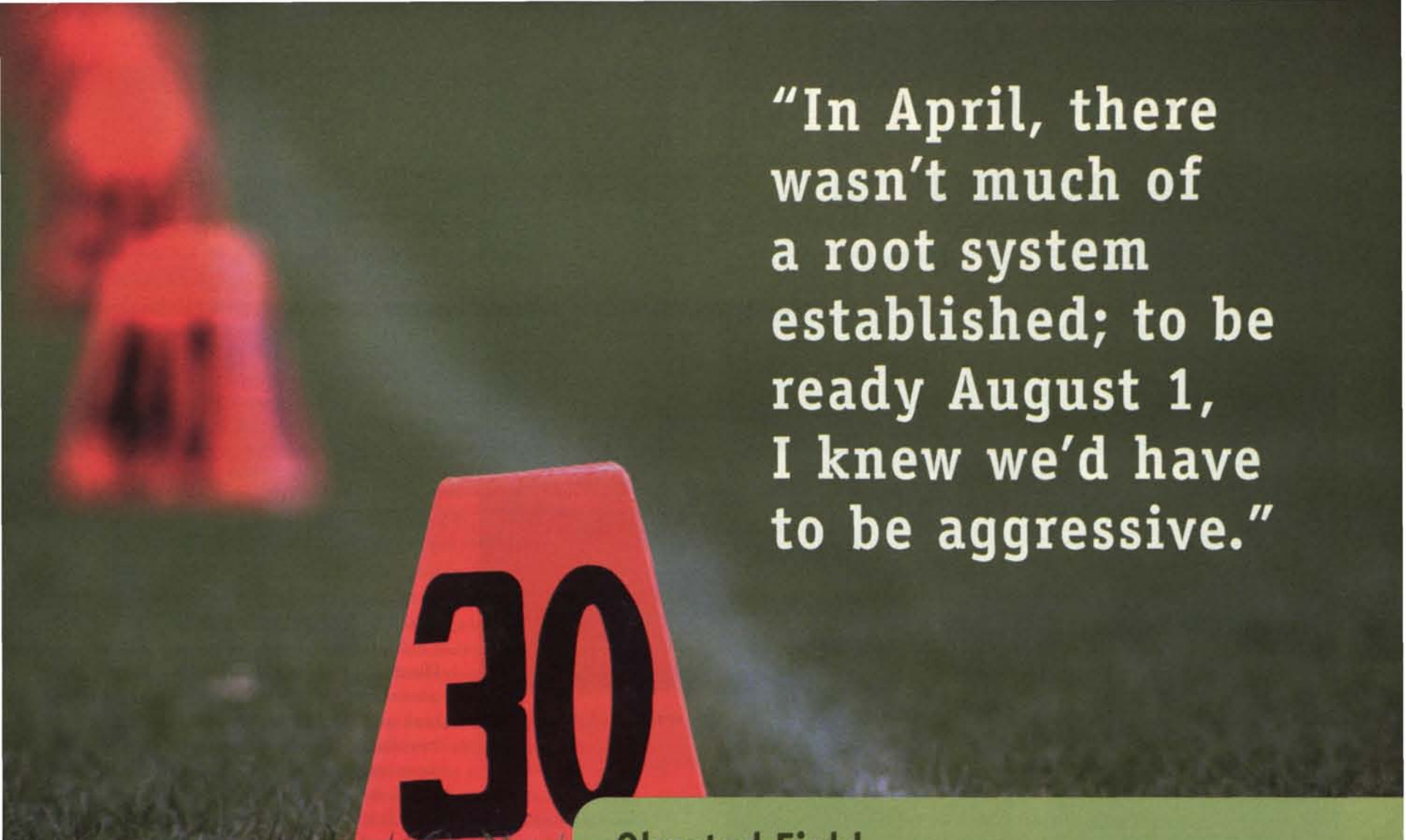
"In the late 90's, Westbrook undertook a major field construction/renovation project for its high school fields. Practice fields for football, soccer, and field hockey, and combination game and practice fields for softball and baseball, were constructed in the surrounding woods on an upper level of the school property. At the same time, Olmsted Field was completely renovated to be used as the football and soccer game field," says Tibbetts.

All of these fields share common construction elements. They were excavated to the native clay sub-base. This was topped by a gravel layer that contains a series of perforated drainage pipes to channel excess subsurface moisture away from the fields. This was topped by a sand-based soil profile. The track surface surrounds Olmsted Field. This field also has a Musco lighting system, with six 150-foot light poles, which was installed many years ago with help from the National Guard. The facility has two concession areas and a press box and seats more than 2,000 spectators for an event.

Tibbetts notes, "Olmsted Field has an 18-inch crown for surface drainage. The other fields have a 1 to 1-1/2-percent grade from corner to corner. The surface water is channeled into drainage swales that were placed around the perimeter of each field. Olmsted and the surrounding fields have Toro 2001 series in-ground irrigation systems. The control panels for these are located under the Olmsted Field press box."

Tibbetts has "worked with turf" since his graduation from Southern Maine Technical College with an AAS in Plant and Soil Science in 1991. He joined the city as sports field manager in 1999. He had previously been serving as Parks and Facilities Manager for the Town of Brunswick overseeing their athletic fields as well as the parks. Before that, he worked as a lawn technician and then a branch manager in the lawn care industry.





"In April, there wasn't much of a root system established; to be ready August 1, I knew we'd have to be aggressive."

Olmsted Field Maintenance Program

All that background was put to use at Westbrook. He says, "When I came on board in April, the upper level fields were completed, but had no turf. Olmsted Field, which had been hydroseeded approximately a year earlier, had about 90 percent turf cover, but didn't have much of a root system established. All the fields were scheduled for use by the first of August. I knew it was going to take a very aggressive program to make that happen."

Safety, playability

Tibbetts' prime focus then and now is providing safety and playability for the athletes while preserving and protecting the city's investment in its fields. He says, "In order for Olmsted Field to stand up to its first season of play, the practice fields would have to absorb the full load of pre-season and in-season practices. So initially we hit the maintenance on the upper level fields the hardest. We slice seeded with a mix of Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass, aerated as frequently as the young turf could handle, matched the fertilization program to the needs of each field, and kept pushing the turf. We used the same procedures on the game field, but there concentrated more on filling in and strengthening the existing turf so we'd have a good base for the full season of play."

The aggressive program paid off. All the fields were ready by August 1 and handled their first season well, despite heavy use. In subsequent seasons, Tibbetts has been able to focus greater attention on the varsity game field to produce and maintain a dense green carpet of turf throughout the football season. He schedules monthly fertilization for it and the other sand-based fields, compared to three fertilizations a year for the general use fields. The football field aeration program is aggressive, at least once a month during the growing season, generally in two

April

- Take soil samples for testing; analyze results
- Roll entire field
- Apply 24-5-11 fertilizer with pre-emergence weed control at 1-lb. of nitrogen (N) per 1,000 sq. ft.
- Put down lines for javelin, discus and shot-put
- Mow 1 to 2 times per week with rotary mower at 2-1/2-in. height of cut

May

- Apply 32-0-10 fertilizer at 1-lb. of nitrogen (N) per 1,000 sq. ft.
- Line field every Tuesday
- Mow 1 to 2 times per week with rotary mower at 2-1/2-in. height of cut
- Start up irrigation system; check system for leaks and other problems
- Core aerate in two directions, leave plugs

June

- Apply 32-0-10 fertilizer at 1-lb. of nitrogen (N) per 1,000 sq. ft.
- Line field every Tuesday
- Mow 3 times per week with reel mower at 1.78-in. height of cut
- Monitor for weeds following IPM practices, apply herbicide if needed
- Monitor for insects following IPM practices, apply insecticide if needed
- Core aerate in one direction, leave plugs
- Slice seed one direction, 40-ft. from edge of track into field

July

- Apply 32-0-10 fertilizer at 1-lb. of nitrogen (N) per 1,000 sq. ft.
- Line field every Tuesday
- Mow 3 times per week with reel mower at 1.78-in. height of cut
- Monitor for insects following IPM practices, apply insecticide if needed
- Core aerate in two directions, leave plugs

- Topdress with 45 tons of washed sand, drag in two directions
- Overseed with 50/50 mix of Kentucky Bluegrass/perennial ryegrass at 3 lb. per 1,000 sq. ft.
- Irrigate lightly each day to keep seed moist through germination; then irrigate deeply three days per week, or as weather conditions warrant

August

- Apply 18-0-18 fertilizer at 1-lb. of nitrogen (N) per 1,000 square ft.
- Mow 3 times per week with reel mower at 1.78-in. height of cut
- Install football goal posts
- Put down football grid; paint soccer lines in royal blue

September

- Apply 24-5-11 fertilizer at 1-lb. of nitrogen (N) per 1,000 sq. ft.
- Line field every Tuesday and Friday
- Mow 3 times per week with reel mower at 1.78-in. height of cut (or 1.5-in. if weather conditions allow)
- Slice aerate in one direction with shatter tines
- Apply 50/50 mix of Kentucky Bluegrass/perennial ryegrass to divots

October

- Apply 21-3-21 fertilizer at 1-lb. of nitrogen (N) per 1,000 sq. ft.
- Line field every Tuesday and Friday
- Mow 2 to 3 times per week with reel mower at 1.78-in. height of cut (or 1.5-in. if weather conditions allow)
- Late October - core aerate in two directions, leave plugs
- Late October - slice seed with 50/50 mix of Kentucky Bluegrass/perennial ryegrass
- Apply lime if needed according to soil test results

November

- Winterize irrigation system
- Remove goal posts
- Winterize equipment

Field of the Year



Olmsted Field, Westbrook, ME, hosts most of that town's biggest sporting events, and well over 115 events each spring through fall.

directions each time. The methods of aerification are varied to fit turf needs and the field use schedule. Cores are not collected on the football field unless they are especially heavy or the field will be topdressed. A rotary mower is used early in the season to help stand up the turf after the winter and to avoid any unexpected debris

that might damage the more expensive reel mower. Turf height is then maintained at 1-7/8-inches with the reel mower. When natural precipitation is good in the late summer and fall, the turf height will be lowered gradually to 1-1/2-inches during the playing season. The field is overseeded heavily in July with a 50/50 mix of Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass. Overseeding continues regularly through the end of the growing season.

Tibbetts works directly for the City Recreation Department and plans and implements the field maintenance programs for all of the athletic fields within the city, including those on school grounds. During the school season, primarily the student athletes use the fields on school sites, with other uses coordinated by Tibbetts. During the summer months, he coordinates the field use schedules for all the fields, spreading the usage to the school sites as well.

The "average" annual use schedule, just for Olmsted Field, follows. In the spring, it hosts 30 track practices and four two-school track meets, one regional track meet that pulls in 10 teams, and a corporate track meet for one of the city's major industries. All track meets use the football field for the discus and javelin events, and as the staging area for the on-track events.

During the summer months, the field is used for the track and field events of recreational programs. This involves another 36 practices and three meets.

Things step up a few notches in the fall. The varsity football team plays seven home games on the field. The girls' soccer team plays 10 games; the boys' soccer

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Olmsted Field's condition is more remarkable because Tibbetts is the only full-time, all-season employee responsible for its care.

team plays 12 games. Tuffy Football plays their All-Star game under the lights one night. The Youth Soccer Program takes over the field another night, allowing several different teams to play. There's also one regional band competition that brings from 10 to 15 bands to the field.

Tibbetts says, "This kind of scheduling is typical for our fields. All of the field use programs start as early as possible in the spring. Traditionally, it takes between 2-3 weeks after snow melt for the playing surfaces of the native soil fields to firm up enough for activity. We can get on the sand-based fields sooner. We'll schedule field use as late in the season as necessary to complete the school and recreational program sports events. General recreational use of the fields takes place whenever weather permits. To preserve field quality, we'll rotate specific fields out of play temporarily to allow them to recuperate or to perform the more disruptive maintenance procedures."

Maytag man

Tibbetts credits the dedication of his staff for keeping the fields in top condition to support all this activity. Doing so is even more remarkable because Tibbetts is the only full-time, full season individual for field maintenance. Tom Pollis has worked with him for 3 years as a full-time employee from April through August and on a part-time basis from September through March. Kevin McCrillis and Mike Didonato are in their second season of working full-time from April through August. Recreation maintenance worker Norman Kinney handles trash detail on all of the fields, which gives Tibbetts and staff more time to focus on field maintenance. Tibbetts says, "These fellows make an excellent team. They'll do whatever it takes to get the job done and give the community's kids the kind of fields they deserve to play on."

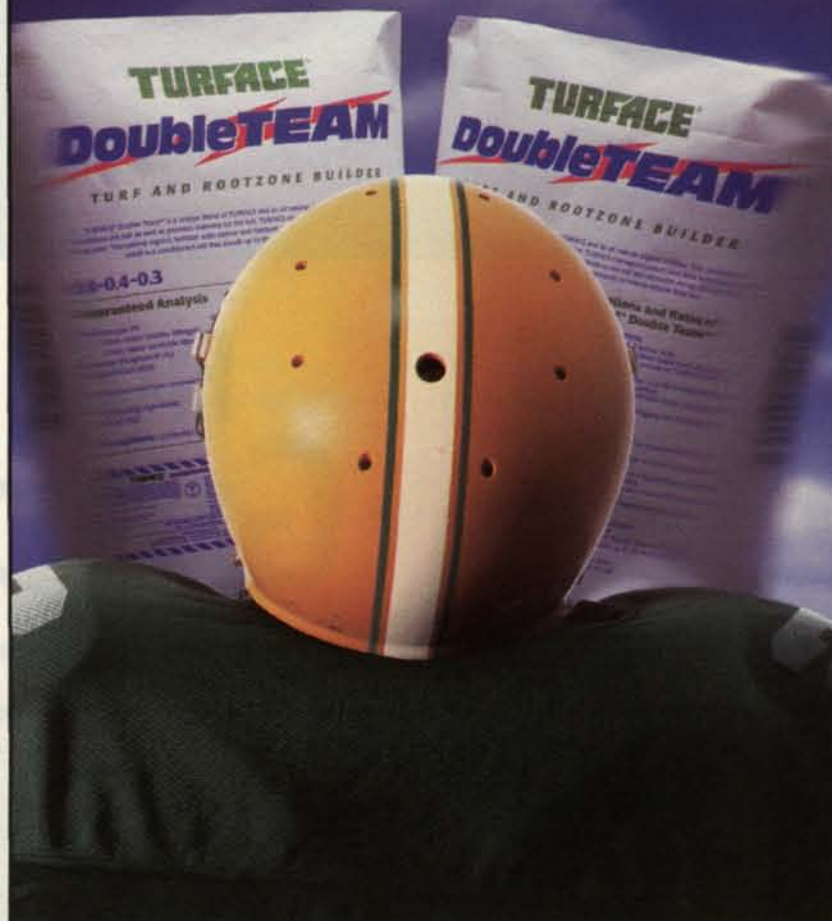
As with most parks and recreation systems, public use of open fields can become a maintenance issue. Tibbetts designates a couple of fields each year to be kept at a minimal maintenance level, yet within the safe zone, for general public recreational use. These fields become the prime sites for pick-up ball games, rocket launchings, and just about anything else one can imagine.

Preserving field quality at the high school site requires extra vigilance because of a walking trail, open to the public and heavily used, that not only winds through the property, but also even connects to the track surrounding Olmsted Field. The open field has great appeal for the weekend warriors that have a hard time letting go of the football fantasies of their youth. There's also the issue of those dog walkers who allow their dogs to run unleashed. Tibbetts and his staff members will drive by the fields periodically to check for unauthorized usage and direct the abusers to the general use fields.

Tibbetts notes, "The support and cooperation from the city have been excellent. They've provided the tools and equipment that let us get the job done. My supervisor, recreation director Randy Peters, is tremendous. He personally handled the mowing of Olmsted Field before my arrival to keep the turf in shape during the post-grow-in transition from the contractor to the city maintenance program. He'll still pitch in, if needed, to help with a maintenance procedure. Our athletic director, Matt Nelson, and our coaches also are committed to excellence in field conditions and are dedicated to their role in preserving the fields. Watching the reactions of the young athletes to playing on a premium field makes the effort worthwhile for all of us."

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