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Clippings

Getting Started

**Director of grounds shares insight into
the challenges of Miller Park's 1st year**



The field at Milwaukee's Miller Park uses three types of bluegrass on a sand base, underlain with pea gravel and a compacted subgrade.

Milwaukee's Miller Park, home of the Brewers, is only the fourth retractable-dome, turfgrass stadium in North America. Its first year, and Milwaukee's weather, posed many challenges.

The field uses three types of bluegrass (no ryegrass) on a sand base, underlain with pea gravel and a compacted subgrade. Proper drainage was a high priority in the design, but adverse weather hindered initial establishment of the turf.

Gary Vanden Berg, the Brewers' director of grounds, was in charge of getting the field ready in time for the Brewers' March 28 exhibition game.

"We couldn't put grass down until March 21," said Vanden Berg. "After it warmed up it was settling and we had to replace it every day for a two-week period."

The drainage lines were installed in December 2000, during harsh winter weather. Frost had to be chipped away to lay the lines.

Although the sand that was brought in for the field was heated to 120 degrees before being put down, the cold outdoor temperatures caused the sand to form into chunks.

"Putting this field in was the hardest thing I've ever done," said Vanden Berg.

Miller Park does not have a heated field, so weather continued to be a factor through May. The soil temperature did not get above 50 degrees during that time.

Miller Park's retractable dome roof adds the benefit of protection from inclement weather, but it also poses some challenges.

"We knew starting the field would be somewhat tricky not just because of cool weather," said Vanden Berg. "Shade was also going to be a challenge, because this facility, like other retractable domes, is taller than traditional ballparks and lets in less sunlight, even with the roof open."

According to Vanden Berg, at one point this season the roof had to remain closed for 5 days straight due to poor weather conditions.

Milorganite, a Milwaukee-based supplier of organic nitrogen fertilizer, helped Vanden Berg's crew deal with the challenges Miller Park posed by supplying two tons of Milorganite fertilizer.

According to Vanden Berg, Milorganite gave the field a boost without concerns of root burning.

The field is currently cut to a length of 1 1/2 in. after beginning the year at 1 1/4 inches. As the field becomes more established it will be cut to a length of 1 inch.

Vanden Berg's crew will replace the outfield this fall, because it was originally put down over frozen ground.

"Another year will make a world of difference," said Vanden Berg.

Train turf techs

Penn State has developed the "Turfgrass and Agricultural Equipment Service Technicians Certificate" to train techs to meet specific needs. Participants in the program will upgrade their current skills in hydraulics, electronics, machinery management, engines, and power transfer, as well as gain hands-on experience with the latest in turfgrass industry equipment.

"By combining the years of industry-specific experience of the advisory committee and the teaching ability of our faculty, we really believe we have created a program that will train techs who will be indispensable to turfgrass operations," says Dr. James Hilton, program director and associate professor of ag engineering and education.

Courses will be delivered through four 8-week sessions over a period of 2 years. For information, call 814-863-1817 or email jwh2@psu.edu.

Still time

Visit your local Cat rental store by the end of October and register to win a week's free rental of a Cat skid steer loader; 52 winners will be chosen and no purchase is necessary.

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