



Cover your bases

Tools and tips for tending to tarps

BY MIKE HEBRARD

More and more schools are purchasing field covers to persevere the baseball season during the wet spring months.

Coaches typically feel that field covers are a good purchase for their teams and can prevent several rain-outs. However, if you are the guy that covers his field and can play on a questionable day, others can't. Your game is caught up and the others play the next dry day, which happens to be sunny and 70 degrees. As a result, your field got torn up playing in wet conditions, while everyone else is playing the same round on a nice day.

HOW TO CHOOSE A FIELD COVER

Field covers keep fields dry, reducing the risk of rainouts. But covers can also play a role in turf enhancement as well as lend themselves to great advertisement/sponsorship arrangements.

The color of covers can play an important role in turf management. For example, in the southern transition zone the length of time a cover can be left on the turf is critical. Heat buildup from the sun under a cover can cause hardships on the turf. In the northern transition zone, field turf managers may want to draw heat to the turf during early spring. Tests conducted by several turf specialists found that certain colors of covers can have a positive effect on turf development.

- White / silver combination, with white side exposed to the sun, on average, has 14 degrees Fahrenheit less heat build up under the cover than other color combinations.
- Black / silver combination, with black side exposed to the sun, draws more heat to the turf surface.
- Orange / white combination allows light penetration and enhances turf development.

- There are a wide variety of other color combinations, but their main benefits are from an esthetic point of view such as team or school colors. Using a sponsor's color choice could help sell that sponsor on donating all or a portion of the cover cost.

Vinyl or woven polyethylene?

Both woven polyethylene and vinyl provide a good cover. The basic rule of thumb is the polyethylene is one-third the weight of vinyl and one half the price. Vinyl offers a larger range of colors and a heavier cover is better for handling in high-wind areas. Vinyl will stand up better if snow removal is an issue on football fields. Also, a plastic zipper for joining sections can be supplied on vinyl covers, but Velcro must be used for jointing sections of polyethylene. Budget and people power will often play a role in the final choice of vinyl or woven polyethylene.

Plate, mound, bases and bullpen covers are available for spot coverage in both polyethylene and vinyl. Be sure and order grommets for staking down.

Vinyl mesh covers (windscreens) can be used for batting practice turf protectors, batters eye background, fence enclosures and seat covers for restricted areas of the stadium.

-Bob Curry, Covermaster Inc.

A full infield tarp takes a lot of manpower to put on and off, so timing and the availability of players is essential. The players also need to have other shoes available in case of a rain delay to quickly cover the field; otherwise the cleats will damage the material. Some coaches have been known to cut players for running onto covered fields while wearing cleats.

Be organized on how a field cover should be unfolded, rolled back up, and where to dump the rainwater. Sometimes a tarp might have to be taken off just to keep down the weight of the rainwater that gets trapped.

On dry days, practice with the grounds crew and players the proper methods to cover and uncover. You might even make a mark on the field where the corner of one end should be so the tarp is properly aligned on the field.

Apply an adequate amount of weights so that the tarp does not blow off the field. Weights can be as simple as used tires, sandbags or, my favorite, 4-inch PVC pipe with a rope handle filled with cement. One person can easily grab four weights and apply, or take off, the tarp.

Handles are also important, especially with girls or players with small hands. The weight of the tarp is hard on the hands if you have to grab and start pulling with your knuckles embedded into the material.

The big day

My number one rule is on the day before the championship game, cover the field no matter what the temperature is. The only time all season that I get to use a tarp is for the Little League Softball World Series. We have teams from the Far East, Europe, Canada, Latin America, and the four U. S. Regions, and they have tight travel plans, so I don't want to get delayed a couple of hours for the championship game on ESPN 2.

It is also important to uncover the field if the tarp has been on for more than 24 hours, which allows for the carbon dioxide to escape to prevent turf damage from the lack of sunlight.

Because the purchase of the field cover is an expensive investment, one option is to paint the sponsor's logo on the tarp. But according to Bob Curry of Covermaster, advertising dollars should be spent on the cover for the tarp when it is rolled up. More people will see the advertisement and it is easier to place logos on the cover for the rolled up tarp than it is to place logos on the actual tarp material. Material that is used on some tarps can be difficult for paint, vinyl lettering and logos to adhere.

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COVERTECH TURF PRODUCTS

Covertech has been protecting golf course greens for more than 12 years, and now the company reports more and more sports turf managers are using their products on their soccer, baseball, and football fields.

Now Covertech has products just for *Sportsturf* readers: Supreme Green growth blanket and the Green Shield rain cover/bench tarp. The Supreme Green product accelerates seed germination, encourages root development, delays dormancy in the fall, reduces ice and frost damage, says Covertech, and is available in any size.

The Green Shield provides protection from rain and snow as well as general wear and tear. It can be used to cover mounds, base and home plate areas, or as a general field cover to avoid rainouts and help protect against injuries. It's made of "rip-stop" woven-coated polyethylene material and UV-treated for long life, says Covertech. The one-piece construction simplifies installation; package includes anchor pegs and storage bag.

COVERTECH

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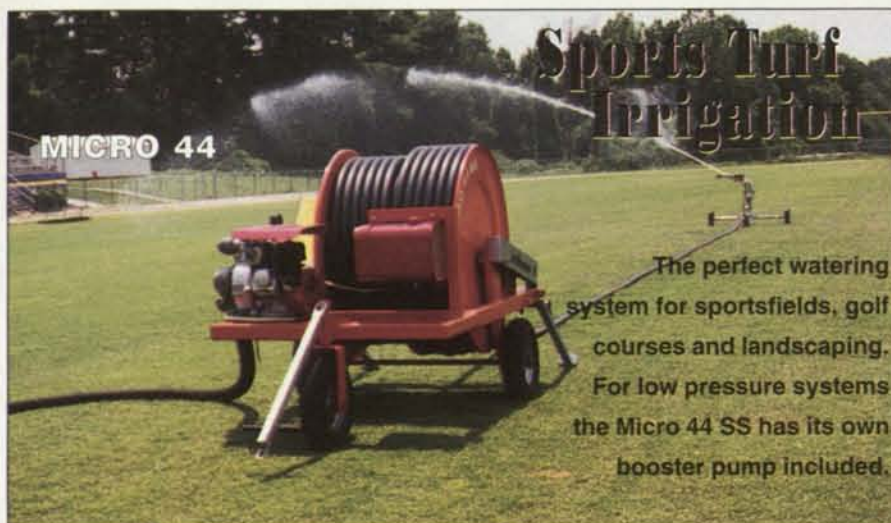
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Everyone knows the name of Doubleday Field in Cooperstown, NY—the home of baseball is a favorite destination for amateur baseball teams and the site of the annual Hall of Fame game. During the baseball season, the historic location often hosts three or four games daily.

Maintaining the turf is difficult not only because of the activity, but also because the time off for turf recovery is during upstate New York's winter. But that's when the job of ensuring healthy turf for the baseball games begins.

"We do everything when it's cold to make the grass stronger," points out Joe Harris, head groundskeeper for the Village of Cooperstown's baseball field since 1990, "so when spring comes we have a jump start on it."

A valued weapon in Harris' arsenal is Typar Turf Blankets. For the past 5 years, he has used the blankets from November until April, installing them by himself. He found that the turf blankets retain warmth and moisture to promote germination and growth, while allowing air and water through to the soil. Turf kept in this "greenhouse" of warmth and moisture will be stronger, have longer roots and will grow faster. The area can be used earlier, resulting in safer conditions, happier customers, and greater usage.

"The first time I used the Typar, I wasn't sure how they would work," Harris says. "But when I took them off and the turf was greener than surrounding areas, I knew they would become a standard part of my regimen."

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FIELD COVERS AND ACCESSORIES

Ball Products' standard field covers are constructed of 6-oz. woven polyester in either black/silver or white/silver. Each has heat-welded seams and hemmed edges. The covers feature #3 grommets, which are spaced at 24-in. centers on the edges. Standard sizes are 18-ft. and 26-ft. diameter. However, any custom size is available. Ball Products also has a full line of vinyl covers in 14- and 18-oz. weights, which are available in a full range of colors. Each vinyl cover is constructed with the same quality as Ball Products' standard 6-oz. covers. Accessories included spikes, spike straps and sandbags.

BALL PRODUCTS

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COVERING YOUR NEEDS

The many models of rain and field covers by COVERMASTER® include RAINCOVERPlus™, a top-of-the-line cover available in various colors with white on one side. Test results show that a white/silver combination is the best to reduce heat build-up. Other popular models are RAINCOVERLite™ and RAINCOVERSuperLite™.

COVERMASTER also offers a range of vinyl covers. TARPMATE™ is a plastic roller that stores most sizes of rain or field covers. TARP MACHINE™ is a tarp rolling accessory that attaches to a 14-hp tractor with a 540 P.T.O. and that helps you install and remove a cover by pushing a loaded TARPMATE™ across the field.

FORUM FLOOR™ is a portable floor specifically designed to be used as a natural turf cover for temporary use. Exclusive to COVERMASTER INC., it is supplied in rolls for easy installation and removal. The newest natural turf cover is ENKAMATPlus™. This unique cover consists of geotextile, a non-woven, needle punched cover material, bonded to Enkamat Flatback, a three dimensional geomatrix. The result is a 'breathing' turf cover of great strength and resilience that allows light and moisture to get through to the grass.

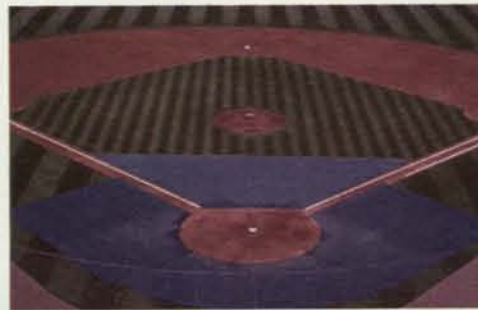
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Your field is only as good as its foundation

INFIELD MATS

The Baltimore Orioles needed portable infield protectors to cover their home plate area during pre-game batting and infield practice. The solution was a set of four tailored mats made from extrusion-coated polyester mesh. Each panel was made with reinforced seams. Hems and grommets were added to allow quick pinning to the ground. Beacon can make these infield-protector panels in any size or shape. These mats protect fields from damage by batted balls and steel-spike foot traffic.



Beacon also makes sideline tarps for football and soccer, track protectors, gym floor covers, and rain tarps. A new "skin tarp" system was developed for the Cincinnati Reds. It's a set of four lightweight, waterproof panels that connect and cover only the dirt portion of the baseball infield. This protects the soil from rain while holding moisture in during sunny "off" days.

BEACON BALLFIELDS

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