



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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Mike Hebrard is founder of Athletic Field Design. He can be reached via e-mail at hebrard@athleticfield.com.