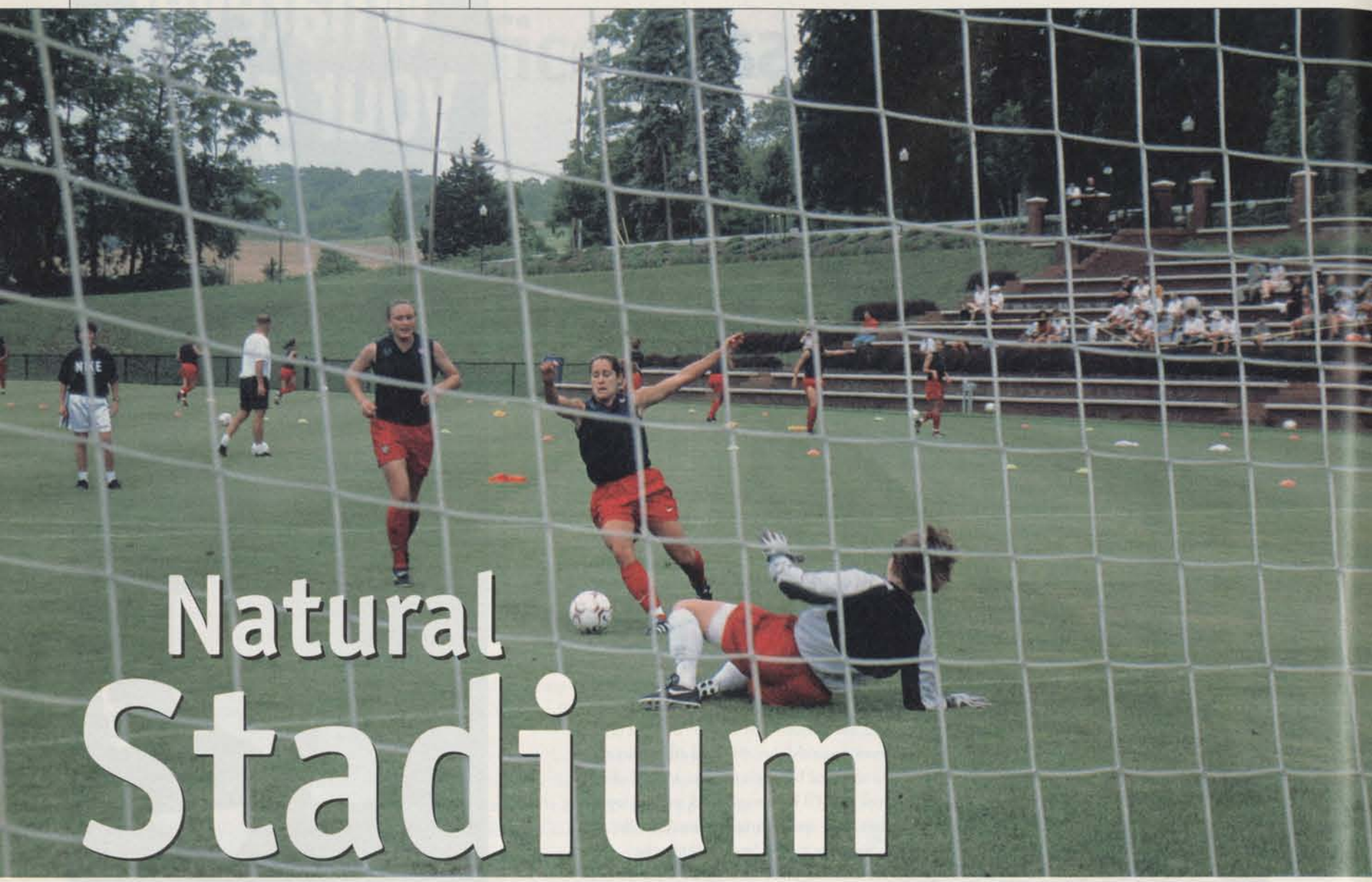

Natural Stadium

Lebanon Valley College Soccer Stadium earns the STMA 2001 Soccer Field of the Year

BY STEVE AND SUZ TRUSTY

The Soccer Stadium of Lebanon Valley College earned the STMA 2001 Soccer Field of the Year Award in the College/University Division. This premium facility is located at the edge of the College campus in the rolling hills of Annville, PA, approximately 10 miles east of Hershey, on a site that was originally farmland.

Expansion of the College's athletic facilities in the late 90s included increasing the size of the Field House to incorporate a fitness center, locker rooms, and training facility. The original varsity soccer field was turned into a parking lot to accommodate the improved Field House. Thus construction of a new varsity soccer field was the next step in the expansion project.

The field was cut into the existing area with organic compost added to augment the native soil. While no inground drainage system was installed, surface drainage was created with a sheet drain using a 1-1/2 percent slope from one side of the field to the other. The field was sodded with a native-soil grown, Kentucky bluegrass sod in July 1998 and was ready for play that fall.

Kevin Yeiser, director of grounds and athletic facilities, says, "The architectural firm of Derck and Edson Associates designed the field to use the existing landscape of hedgerows and trees to full advantage, giving the facility a truly unique identity. This, along with the college's commitment to high-level maintenance, is what sets this stadium apart from other collegiate soccer facilities.

"Working with over 20 feet of grade change, the soccer field was nestled into place to maintain the existing hedgerows to create a natural stadium atmosphere. The seating area was designed to become part of the natural feel of the stadium. Spectators can enjoy the game from seat walls laid into the hillside forming many small terraces. The split-face concrete block is typically used for retaining walls. Our blocks were created with custom tones of deep maroon and terracotta. A custom-molded concrete cap tops the seat walls to finish the look. This seating has a capacity of 750 and the flanking slopes can provide seating for hundreds more. A compliment of perennials, shrubs and trees anchor the hardscape to the surrounding site.

Lebanon Valley College Soccer Stadium Maintenance Program

April:
- Granular fertilizer 32-5-7 at 1 pound of N per thousand square feet
- Spot seed and topdress
- Liquid biostimulant application

May:
- Broadleaf and annual grassy weed control as needed following standard IPM procedures
- Grub and/or sod webworm control application if needed following standard IPM procedures
- Mid-month application of liquid biostimulant
- Late-month granular fertilizer 32-5-7 at 1 pound of N per thousand square feet

June:
- Liquid biostimulant application
- Pythium, red thread or dollar spot control if needed following standard IPM procedures

August:
- Renovation: core aerate, topdress, slice/seed, fertilize, roll lightly, irrigate

September:
- Liquid biostimulant application
- Granular fertilizer (formula to be determined at time of application)

October:
- Liquid biostimulant application
- Spot seed

November:
- Core or deep tine aerate
- Granular fertilizer (formula to be determined at time of application)

Field of the Year

The architectural firm of Derck and Edson Associates designed the field to use the existing landscape of hedgerows and trees to full advantage, giving the facility a truly unique identity. That along with a commitment to high-level maintenance, sets this stadium apart.

"Adding to the unique feel of the stadium is a dramatic pedestrian bridge that spans a major highway. It connects another facility constructed during the expansion, our McGill Baseball Field, adjacent to the Soccer Stadium, to one of the parking lots on the complex. Rising more that 30 feet over the highway, cables attached from the bridge deck to two large towers provide the look and feel of a suspension bridge. Our coaches use this to great advantage, as visiting prospective student athletes get their first view of the Soccer Stadium and the adjacent McGill Field while looking down from the bridge deck. Extensive landscaping and a concrete walk that connects all 100 acres give a park-like atmosphere to the sports complex that enhances the entire community."

The maintenance program as developed by Yeiser, and carried out by Keith Evans, athletic field foreman, and Peter Petrov, athletic field technician, focuses on safety and playability for all field users. They work together with a staff of three part-time personnel during the summer and two student personnel during the fall and winter semesters, to maintain the entire athletic complex, including the landscaping. Evans and Petrov spend most of their time on field maintenance. The remainder of the staff focuses primarily on common turf area maintenance.

Yeiser says, "The two student staff personnel help wherever they are needed during the semester, each putting in approximately 15 hours per week. Even though each staff person has a main area of responsibility, all are trained in and competent to assist in, all areas. In addition, Evans and Petrov are required to obtain and maintain a Pennsylvania pesticide application license for turf and ornamentals. Their commitment to excellence and their dedication to putting forth whatever it takes to get the job done right, combined with the cooperation and support of our administration, have elevated what was already a great program to Field of the Year status.

"We also have a very good team of coaches. In fact, our soccer coach may be even more protective of the field than we are. There's never a problem if we ask to have a non-traditional game moved over to the practice fields because of rainfall that affects the game field. And the coaches do an excellent job of rotating their practice areas to minimize field wear."

Because the College athletic complex includes a soccer practice field, the stadium field can be used strictly for games and the occasional pre-game walk through. As with most University sports programs, the "traditional" soccer season is augmented with a "non-traditional" season, putting play on the fields for a greater period of the year. For soccer, this non-traditional spring season play starts in March. The local high school girl's team plays on the field in the spring. The Lebanon Valley Classic youth tournament takes place the end of June with more than 80 teams participating. The semifinal and final games are held on the stadium field. The field also hosts a few adult team games in the spring. Summer camps begin in June and continue into August, putting several more games on the stadium field. The men's and women's varsity teams return in August with play starting that month and, hopefully, continuing into the NCAA playoffs during November. The boy's high school season also brings several games to the field in the fall. It also hosts a winter youth tournament.

Yeiser notes, "The College has been fortunate to host some world class athletes as well. The United States men's Olympic team, the class "A" professional Hershey Wildcats team, and the national women's teams from China, Brazil, and the USA have all used the LVC soccer field as a training facility. In fact, the men's Olympic coach proclaimed LVC's soccer field as one of the best the team had played on.

As with most University sports programs, the "traditional" soccer season is augmented with a "non-traditional" season.

"We are getting more and more requests from the high schools to host games. The College has encouraged these events since they create added exposure for perspective students, though it does put a little more pressure on the field and on the crew. It's great to have the teams come in and experience this level of playing surface. Overall, the active season for the field is March through the first week in December, with 80 some events hosted. We strive to maintain the field at the championship level year-round, to accommodate all this play and to provide our coaches with the opportunity to take advantage of the exposure the high-level teams create to use the field as a recruiting tool."

With weather in January and February seldom allowing on-field work, late November and December become the prime window for spring field preparation. That's also the slowest period for activity in the other campus sports. If weather doesn't cooperate, that pushes spring preparation for all the athletic fields into early March. Varsity soccer preparation traditionally involves heavy aerification, some topdressing, filling in any worn areas, and some overseeding. A grow blanket then covers the field.

The field does get some runoff from the higher elevations. To compensate over the years, a combination of aerification and the addition of a lightweight-composted topdressing material has helped further improve the modified native soil. The object is to try to take the moisture element out of the equation so the field always plays true, even if it is raining during the game.

Overseeding during the season has added perennial ryegrass to the original Kentucky bluegrass of the sod with the ratio now approximately 80 percent Kentucky bluegrass and 20 percent perennial ryegrass. The turf is maintained with a reel mower to a consistent height of 7/8-inch.

Irrigation for the field is supplied by an on-site well and is delivered to the turf by an over the top water reel. Currently, McGill Field, the University's baseball game field (and STMA's 2000 College/University Baseball Field of the Year), is the only field with an in-ground irrigation system. Planning ahead, the supply piping for the soccer field was included during the development of the complex, with the intent to add the in-ground system later.

With water use becoming more of an issue, and especially with the drought situation in the East, Yeiser anticipates the increased efficiency and greater ability to track actual usage will put the irrigation system on the priority list. The reduced labor needs and greater time flexibility also are factors. Because the soccer and baseball fields are side by side, it's easy to compare the two sites.

Yeiser says. "During March and April we actually worked at drying the fields because we had so much rain. But we're behind in overall rainfall and the water table is low. We've added wetting agents and microbiology to the overall maintenance program to gain greater benefit from the water that is applied. We have real concerns about what we would be able to do with irrigation should restrictions be instituted. Putting water on and getting water off the field are extremely important. Controlling the water factor affects every other part of your program: mowing, fertilization, aeration, and pest management."

Yeiser has served the University in his current position since 1982, overseeing the expansion from approximately 20 acres of athletic facilities to the current 100 acres. He says, "I've always been a big believer in the national Sport Turf Managers Association and our regional KAFMO Chapter of STMA. Being able to network and discuss the challenges and the ideas on how to solve them is a real key to raising the standards of field quality at all levels. We also have a good relationship with Penn State University and their extension personnel and use their knowledge and expertise. We're notorious for borrowing an idea that works for others. We're always looking for things that have been successful at other facilities to incorporate into our program. Since we can see the success of their results, we don't expect a lot of failures."

They've borrowed the idea of using crumb rubber in that 2-1/2-foot swath along the sidelines where the linesmen run. Yeiser notes, "It seems to provide an extra cushion and help to protect the crown of the plant. We've also incorporated it in the goalmouths, combined with aeration and overseeding, to reduce wear. We do some pregermination of seed to speed turf development, making a patch mix with topsoil, our composted topdressing and the seed. If necessary toward the end of the season, we have replaced the sod in the goalmouths, sometimes using 8 x 8-foot sod panels. Last year, we contracted deep tine aerification to the 12 to 13-inch level, and found that beneficial to overall field condition."

Fertilization is based on soil test results, with the program primarily granular supplemented with liquids when needed. In 2000, they instituted a very late fertilization, making the application around Thanksgiving. That resulted in a nice green up in the spring and continues to be part of the program.

The field is lined for every game during the fall varsity season. In the spring, that drops back to approximately once per week. The field corners are pinned so it's relatively easy to run the strings for accurate lining.

Yeiser says, "Every year the College attempts to add or improve some aspect of the stadium in hopes of providing a memorable experience for everyone who has a chance to play here. Our staff is committed to making the field a little better each year as well. That's been the winning combination for our program." ST