

## Softball Field of the Year

# C. Moore Field of Putnam City West HS



BY SUZ TRUSTY

**C**. Moore Field of Putnam City West High School, Oklahoma City, OK, earned the STMA 2002 Softball Field of the Year Award in the High School/Parks and Recreation Division. The field, constructed in 1994, was named for former coach and initial developer of the facility, Charlie Moore.

Field management is the responsibility, and the passion, of Rick Newville, who became coach of the Lady Patriots fastpitch softball program in July 2001. He had transferred to the school from Putnam City North in August 2000 to teach biology to sophomore and junior students and to join West's four-coach baseball staff as an assistant. Soon after, he instigated a renovation program for Patriot Field that rallied the forces of the school, coaches, players, Booster Club, and community. These efforts earned Patriot Field STMA baseball field of the year honors in 2001. So it was easy to anticipate he'd focus the same forces on C. Moore Field when he took over the softball program. His passion for the perfect field began long before that.

The interest was sparked when Newville and his friend Monte McCoy (now sports turf manager for the Oklahoma RedHawks Baseball Club) played college baseball at El Reno Junior College (now Redlands Community College). Newville moved on to complete his Bachelors degree in science education at the University of Oklahoma. He began teaching and coaching within his current school district in August 1994. He and McCoy coached American League baseball together in Norman. Then McCoy headed the program that earned the Beam Clay Diamond of the Year award for Oklahoma University.

The passion for perfection, experience as a player, and science education produce a winning combination and Newville makes full use of it. He says, "My science background enables me to work with the concepts of field management and the hands-on labor turns those concepts into action. Seeing the impact of field maintenance on safety and playability got me hooked. And, working with students gives me the ability to use the field care aspect as another educational tool."

C. Moore Field was in need of special attention. All cultural practices on the field had been neglected throughout the spring and early summer months of 2001. Then Mother Nature turned up the heat with several 100-plus degree days thrown into the already hot, dry conditions. By July, this had resulted in a weed-covered, burned up surface.

"My first task was heavy irrigation to soften the soil," says Newville. "Then





I lightly core aerified to aid in moisture penetration. The outfield in-ground irrigation system had been installed in 1997. It consists of four zones with a total of 16 heads. There is no in-ground irrigation for the wings or the skinned surface, but we do have quick connect valves behind the plate and next to the first base dugout.

"Before the initial development of the field, the area had been used as a landfill site during construction of the west wing of the high school, so deep, underlying debris does affect some field maintenance issues.

C. Moore Field is a native soil, with a combination of loam to sandy loam soil that provides adequate infiltration and percolation rates. There is no crown on the field, but the natural slope of the site was retained in the construction and provides surface drainage running from home plate toward first base."

The turf is basically common bermudagrass, with some sections where sod of improved varieties has been installed in front of dugouts, behind the plate, and on the back side of the infield. This came about through the efforts of a former coach who had worked out the donation of leftover pallets of sod during construction of a local housing development.

Newville says, "I gradually lowered the turf height of cut from mid-July to mid-August, going from approximately 2 inches to 7/8 of an inch. Post-emergence herbicide also was applied during this time to eliminate weeds. We brought in 30 tons of infield clay and two tons of calcined clay and worked it into the skinned area to bring it back to playable condition. We cut sod from a nearby area to fill in the weakest spots of the field and redefined the skinned area. Softball is a fall sport for Oklahoma City high schools. By opening day in mid-August, the field was 'playable.' Many considered it one of the better surfaces around. But I felt more improvements were essential to give our players the best surface possible."

As soon as the softball season ended in October, Newville began aggressive field reconstruction and renovation. He says, "We brought in 130 tons of infield clay to bring the skinned area up to grade. We installed warning tracks of crushed volcano rock. We began a topdressing program using washed sand.

"Winter weather shut us down, but we started again in the spring of 2002, coordinating the projects around the teams' spring workouts. We'd reached the infield clay consistency I was after: 60 percent sand, 15 percent silt, and 25 percent clay. We tilled four tons of calcined clay into the infield skin and topdressed with two tons of vitrified clay. We also tackled facility facelift improvements. We added a new 300-seat bleacher set. Players' parents and booster club members helped erect a permanent outfield fence and paint all building structures a neutral 'ballpark' green."

School district funding for the softball program is very limited, so other resources were needed. The Assistant Coach is the Athletic Director, Mike Nunley, who is totally supportive of the field improvement program and the rallying of volunteer support to accomplish it. The booster club is the prime resource for funding.

Newville says, "Our softball and baseball booster clubs combine with the baseball program to cover the leasing costs on the two reel mowers the programs share, a 68-inch triplex and a 25-inch walk behind. They split the monthly payments. The softball and baseball booster clubs also worked with



the school to purchase a bunker rake for the two programs. I've worked out a cooperative agreement with a local agriculture and turf product company.

They supply us with additional seed, fertilizer, conditioners, herbicides, fungicides, and insecticides in exchange for signage at the field. Use of equipment such as aerators, rollers and sod cutters is acquired through a similar trade out agreement. The booster club provides additional funding for both renovation materials and daily maintenance materials that are needed beyond those supplied through the cooperative arrangements and the school district budget."

Additional improvements continued before and after the 2002 playing season. Newville says, "The warning track had a tendency to become powdery and dusty. To combat this and make the surface firmer, we topdressed with clay and raked it in. We redefined the back side of

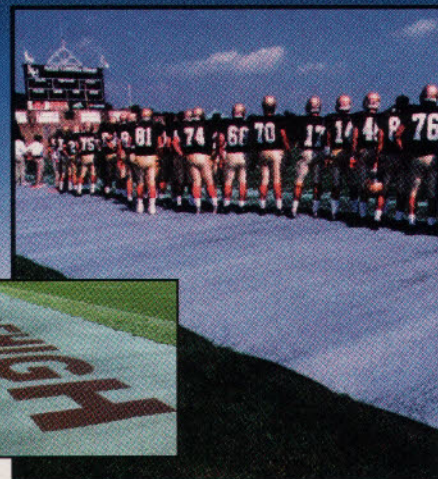
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the infield, creating more of diamond, than a rounded, shape, attacking the lip at the same time. We removed the sod, releveled where the existing arc had been, and established the new outfield edge. During November, we installed a French drain on the back side of first base, the field's low spot, running a lateral line from that point to outside the playing surface."

C. Moore Field plays host to the varsity, junior varsity, and freshman fast-pitch teams. That puts a total of 90 games on the field each fall, in addition to the daily practices in which the three teams participate. A middle school tournament also is held in the fall. This past season, Oklahoma City University and the USAO in Chickasha, OK, played a doubleheader there. Our three teams have workouts, though not mandatory practices, throughout the summer. A couple of the summer league teams also use it for their practices. Team physicals are held the first of August, followed by the official workout and practice sessions and the fall playing season.

On a typical day during the season, Newville will arrive at the school around 7:00 am to water the infield before classes begin at 7:45. He'll hit the field again late in the morning when his teaching stint is completed for the



A May tornado destroyed two storage buildings and blew them onto the field, where they were pulled off with a tractor.



Newville once again will have to rally his team to get the field back in Field of the Year condition.

day. Field preparation follows. He says, "Much of work will be done at night, post game, with the help of the players and a couple student groundskeepers. I'll groom the warning track and tooth drag the infield with the bunker rake. They'll leaf rake the edges and then help me with pitching circle and home plate repair. We'll tarp these overnight. Students also help with cleanup, including the dugouts.

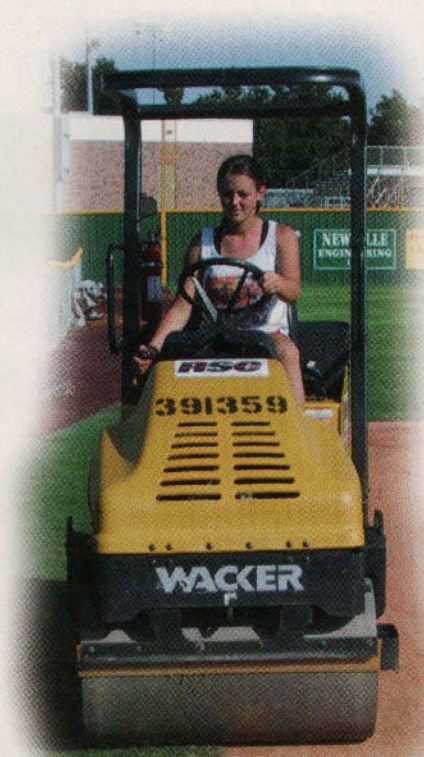
"After class, I'll do any rebuilding needed on the pitching circle and plate area. Then I'll float drag and then mat drag the skinned area and manicure the edges. I'll water the infield again around noon. Next, I'll double cut the outfield with the triplex and walk mow the wings in one direction. I generally keep the turf height at 3/4 to 5/8-inch, depending on weather conditions and field use schedules. I burn the stripes from foul pole to foul pole and from home to second. I'll water for the third time about an hour before the girls come out for their 2:30 PM practice or on game days, just prior to the 4:00 PM game."

Newville oversees the bermudagrass to keep active turf growth throughout as much of the year as possible and to improve aesthetics. He experimented with an intermediate blend of perennial ryegrass this past season. He says, "I picked the blend for faster transition out in the spring, but we've had a cooler season than usual, so bermudagrass resurgence has been delayed. The growth habit of the blend is excellent, but maybe too fast to be practical. I've been mowing every day throughout the off-season to keep it looking good. It's also a lighter green and seems to require a little more fertilizer. I'll probably go back to a perennial ryegrass blend this year."

With the field to the point of meeting his standards, you'd think Newville would have an easy 2003. Mother Nature had other ideas. Multiple tornadoes moved through Oklahoma City on May 8-9. Mike Nunley called him from the school early Saturday morning with news that the school and the field had been hit. The auditorium roof had significant damage; the rest of the building was spared.

The baseball and softball field fences were destroyed and at the baseball field, one of the lights was bent over in half and touching the ground. The cinder block softball dugouts were damaged and the front façade of one was pulled up and off the ground. But plastic owls on top of the metal roofing were still perched in place to fend off any birds. Two storage buildings were blown onto the field and virtually destroyed. They had to be pulled off with a tractor and chain. The screws and bolts that had held them together were blown throughout the field, as were small sections of debris. The infield amendments and warning track materials also were blown and scattered, but traveled toward the south of the outfield turf, rather than into it. Further emphasizing the unpredictability of tornadoes, the bleachers didn't appear to be touched.

Athletic field repairs are basically on hold until insurance inspections and adjustments are completed. But, with the already tight budgets and the extensive damage to the auditorium, it's very likely that Newville will need to once again rally his team, team parents and booster club to bring C. Moore Field back to Field of the Year condition.



Suz Trusty is director of communications for STMA. She can be reached at 800-323-3875.

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# 2001-2002 Annual Maintenance Program

## July-August 2001:

Implementation of turf program  
Lower height of cut from 2-inches to 7/8-inch  
Core aerify in one direction with 1/2-inch tines at 4-inch spacing; break up cores.  
Fertilize with 32-3-8 with 3 % iron, 25 % SCU (sulphur coated urea) at rate of 1/2 lb. of N/1000 square feet every two weeks.  
Fertilize once with 5-10-31 at rate of 1 lb. K.  
Work 30 tons of clay into infield.  
Redefine back of skinned area and sod along arc.  
Construct permanent outfield fence (booster parents)

## September 2001:

Fertilize with 18-23-12 at rate of 1 lb. of N/1000 square feet.  
Apply phosphorous at rate of 1 lb./1000 square feet.  
Core aerify in one direction; remove cores

## October 2001:

Overseed with transitional blend of 2/3 perennial ryegrass and 1/3 intermediate ryegrass at rate of 8 lb./1000 square feet in outfield and 10 lb./1000 square feet on wings.  
Topdress with washed sand at 1/4-inch rate.  
Continue mowing at 7/8-inch HOC.

## November: 2001:

Fertilize with 21-7-14 at rate of 1/2 lb. N/1000 square feet.  
Mow as needed.  
Install warning track in front of dugouts and backstop.

## December 2001:

Incorporate 90 tons of infield clay in skinned area.  
Mow as needed.

## January - February 2002:

Incorporate 40 tons of infield clay in skinned area.  
In February, fertilize with 18-5-10 with preemergent at rate of 1 lb. N/1000 square feet.  
Mow as needed.

## March 2002:

Cut out warning tracks to outfield fence and remove sod.  
Mow as needed.

## April - May 2002:

Core aerate in two directions; remove cores.  
Topdress with washed sand at 1/4-inch rate.  
Fertilize with 18-5-10 with preemergence at rate of 1 lb. N/1000 square feet.  
Put down textile and crushed aggregate on warning tracks.  
Remove five-foot section of sod to remove back lip and redefine arc; topdress with sand.  
Install removed sod to redefine home plate area.  
Mow daily.

## June 2002:

Fertilize with 17-5-9 with 10 % sulphur at rate of 1/2 lb. N/1000 square feet.  
Slice aerate in two directions.  
Core aerate in one direction; remove cores.  
Spot treat with postemergence herbicide if needed, following standard IPM practices.  
Mow daily.

## July - August 2002:

In July, treat for grubs if needed, following standard IPM practices.  
Fertilize with 21-7-14 at rate of 1 lb. N/1000 square feet.  
Slice aerate in two directions.  
Mow daily.

## September 2002:

Core aerate in one direction; remove cores.  
Fertilize with 18-24-12 at rate of 1 lb. N/1000 square feet.  
Apply phosphorous at rate of 1 lb./1000 square feet.  
Mow daily.



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