Field of the Year

Je Park Arlington Baptist School wins FOY

BY SUZ TRUSTY

agle Park of Arlington Baptist School, Baltimore, MD, earned the 2002 Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) Baseball Field of the Year Award in the High School/Parks division. The field quality and conditions that earned this award are the result of the quest for excellence spearheaded by Andrew Gossel, head of athletic field maintenance, boys' athletic director, and physical education teacher for the school.

Gossel arrived at the school in August of 1997 to teach at both the high school and middle school levels and to coach. During his interview for this

position the previous May, he had viewed the school's fields only from a distance. He was aware they needed quite a bit of attention, but the extent of that "attention" was beyond anything he had imagined.

Part of the Arlington Baptist School facility is located in an area of underlying rock. Gossel says, "From what I have been told, the original construction design for the high school building placed it where the fields are now, but there was so much rock at that site they were unable to get the foundation of the building in the ground. Eagle Park now sits on that site, a raised rock ledge in relationship to the building. The rock addition, the fields are all composed of a native soil that is very high in clay content with a very low percolation rate. During my first spring here, we had 12 straight days of rain. Three days after the rains stopped, we could still hear water trickling across the fields." As is the case in many high schools across the country, the baseball and soft-

As is the case in many high schools across the country, the baseball and softball fields are adjoining so they can do double duty, with the majority of both outfields forming the school's soccer field. The soccer field runs from the edge

the infields.

issues, caused a large amount of water to run toward and across the infield. In



underneath the field results in widely varying root zone levels throughout the field area.

"Because of the location of the underlying rock, the natural grade of the field uses sheet grading (pitching from one side of the field to the other), rather than crowning for surface drainage. The baseball infield is on the low side of the grade. The wooded residential properties that border the school on the field side are higher than the fields. These factors, combined with other logistical brother's landscaping business so I had a basic soil and plant background. I also had played on my high school's teams and had a pretty good understanding of what field conditions should be. Here, most of the center of the soccer field (the outfield of the baseball field) was dirt and rocks. The baseball infield had a 10-12

of the baseball field to the edge of the

softball field, ending about 3 feet from

Gossel says, "When I first set foot on

our soccer field, for our first day of prac-

tice, I had to ask our players whether it

was really the soccer field! Though I'd

had no previous experience in sports turf

management, I had worked in my older

inch deep erosion gully across the middle of the skinned portion. The pitcher's mound was 2 feet closer to first base than to third base. It was obvious that the infield was not even square, let alone having the infield edges and lips cared for properly."

Gossel says, "In 1998, as my first spring baseball season approached, I organized the forces of some enthusiastic baseball players to take on the athletic field as a project. Our first session was a daylong effort to edge the field and get the skinned area in as good a playing condition as possible. Safety was our primary focus, with playability close behind. We continued working on improving basic maintenance practices throughout the season."

After seeing the results of those initial field improvements, the school administrators began to consider some field renovations. Gossel's father, Harold, and younger brother, Doug, who are in the excavation/grading industry in Buffalo, NY, volunteered three to four days of help with renovations if materials and equipment would be available.

"Once the arrangements were in place, we made full use of those four days," notes Gossel. "We shaped a berm/swale along the high (residential neighborhood) side and also the right (parking lot) side of our athletic fields in

order to keep a large majority of the runoff water off the fields. We also were able to regrade approximately 75 percent of the field, bringing rocks to the surface and removing them; leveling high and low spots; and developing a consistent slope. We were able to get moving in the right direction, in part due to the donation of time and some materials by athletic field specialist, Tim Anderson, a long-time MAFMO STMA Chapter member."

The existing turf was predominantly turf-type tall fescues. Gossel opted to retain that and gradually improve density through overseeding with Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass, starting with a "cleat seed" program that fall. The current ration is 80 percent tall fescue, 10 percent blue, and 10 percent rye.

Gossel says, "The lower maintenance turf is extremely important since our fields have no in-ground irrigation system and initially had no irrigation system at all. We've been able to irrigate by developing a system of 800 feet of 1-3/4-inch fire hose and seven sprinklers with pop-up heads. Once we worked out the operating procedures, the set up takes approximately 30 minutes, while a short area move requires about 20 minutes. Due to this labor-intensive time factor, irrigating the entire field area takes 2 to 3 days."

Gossel notes the field improvement program has been a gradual process with some learning curves included. During the initial regrading of the infield, the soil added during the process proved to be a poor match for field needs. In the summer of 2000, Gossel connected with Patrick Drimmie of Scotland Yard, Inc., a KAFMO STMA Chapter member, to pull out that soil and replace it with a more workable mix. They also installed a series of three French drain lines around the low side of the baseball infield. The first is 10 feet off the back infield line, with the other two extending out from it. These run parallel to each other, spaced 10 feet apart on center, circling around the back of the infield. This has helped to eliminate even more water from traveling across the infield skin. Gossel and Drimmie have developed a cooperative working arrangement, trading equipment and work hours to continue the improvement process.

Gossel says, "Learning skinned area management has been the biggest learning curve for me. The networking process has been incredible. Al Capitos with the Baltimore Orioles has been a great resource. Don Fowler, now retired as Penn State extension turfgrass specialist, the KAFMO chapter team, and the Little League field managers allowed me to work with them on the grounds crew for the 2000 Little League World Series, which gave me hands-on experience and great training with mound building and batters box and base path preparation.

"Taking that experience back to my field has helped me develop water management and surface preparation techniques to achieve the best playability levels for our athletes. It's not just that every field responds differently, but also that the same field responds differently dependent on conditions. Making the adjustments is a trial and error process on every field. Understanding the interactions has enabled me to fine tune the process, so that I now can determine water



application amounts and timing based on the temperatures, humidity levels, winds, and other weather conditions.

"When I first arrived, there was only a backstop and a small amount of fence in front of each bench for player protection. The winter following the summer of renovations, we fenced off about 60 percent of the field to prevent vandàlism. Due to the shape of the field (285 in right, 350 in center), we had to erect a large wall in right field. We also use the berm as part of that fence. There's a slope in front of the wall with the fence at the top to give it a unique look.

"Long-term plans seek to establish an 'old-time' feel to Eagle Park. The plans include adding more fencing, both permanent and temporary, which will completely enclose both the baseball and softball fields. When the fence is completed,

there will be a 'Death Valley' in left center (410 between the gap and center). Other plans include brick dugouts, a concession stand with a picnic area in between the baseball and softball fields, more trees, a warning track, lights and a 40-foot manually operated scoreboard built into the right field wall."

The Eagle Park baseball field currently is used from 8-1/2 to 9 months a year with well over 100 on-field events each year. The high school varsity and the middle school teams play baseball from March through May. From the start of April until August 1st, the field is leased for practices and games by a 14-and-



All the quality features of a professional golf course sprayer at a price that is making many pro greenskeepers blush with embarrassment after paying too much for another sprayer. All this and safe low profile design makes the Stadium-80 one of the safest sprayers of its size. Who would have thought a little league park could afford equipment that outshines that of many professional golf courses and stadiums.

Call today and know you are making the right decision.



Circle 104 on card or www.oners.ims.ca/2079-104

Field of the Year

under team, as well as two men's league teams. The school's soccer program takes over the outfield for practices and games from mid-August through November.

Infield renovations and major maintenance can be undertaken once the season is completed. But, because of the overlapping field use, any major renovation within the soccer area must take place at the end of the soccer season in the late fall or during the 2-week window in early August between the end of summer baseball and the start of fall soccer. Gradual improvements in maintenance practices, such as aeration, topdressing, overseeding, and cleat seeding, are incorporated year-round.

Weather has been a special challenge in 2002 and early 2003. The worst summer drought on record combined with the uneven depths of the soil profile created multiple hot spot situations. Gossel was constantly adjusting strategies to reduce the impact of the hot spots without overwatering adjacent areas. Irrigation restrictions also came into play. A 10 percent cutback was mandated toward the end of July. A 50 percent cutback was mandated by the middle of August along with restricted irrigation hours of between 8 PM and 8 AM. That was followed in late winter and early spring, first by the heaviest snows on record and then by heavy and extended rains. This late, heavy precipitation has delayed spring field preparation by nearly a month.

"It's always a game of strategy, working to get your field to the best possible level of safety and playability within the conditions, resources and circumstances you have. I can't say enough about the impact of the help from others within the industry. It's an incredible resource. I also credit the help and support of the Arlington Baptist School administration, and especially that of senior administrator, Tom Rider, for their commitment to continual field and facility improvement."

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

Eagle Park Maintenance program

December - February:

Regrade infield skin Finish any remaining edging; removing lips Rebuild all mounds, batters/catchers boxes

March - April:

Aerate monthly, alternate hollow core and solid tine depending on field use schedules and weather conditions; when core aerating, drag cores in

Apply 1/4-in. vitrified clay as topdressing on infield skin Apply granular crabgrass pre-emergent combined with 4-5-4 fertilizer

Mow 2 - 3 times per week at 2.25in. height of cut, gradually moving to 2-in. (dependent on conditions); double cut on game days Cut and paint foul lines/logos

weekly

Drag infield skin daily Chalk foul lines/batters boxes on

infield skin for all games

May:

Aerate monthly, alternate hollow core and solid tine depending on

field use schedules and weather conditions; when core aerating, drag cores in

Mow 2-3 times per week at 2-in. height of cut; double cut on game days

Edge infields

Cut and paint foul lines/logos weekly

Chalk foul lines/batters boxes on infield skin for all games Drag infield skin daily

Fertilize in early May with 16-4-8 (approximately 1 lb. of N/1,000 sq. ft.)

Plant annual flowers in all beds around backstop and bullpen

June - August:

Aerate monthly, alternate hollow core and solid tine depend-

ing on field use schedules and weather conditions; when core aerating, drag cores in

Mow 1-2 times per week at 2.25-in. height of cut Topdress/overseed all worn areas

Apply general fungicide to eliminate diseases as necessary following standard IPM practices

Paint and chalk lines/boxes on infield skin for all games Drag infield as needed

Apply selective herbicide in early August to eliminate any clover, crabgrass or other invasive weeds as necessary following standard IPM practices

> Apply granular broadleaf weed control in mid- to late August, combined with 21-3-7 fertilizer (approximately 1 lb. of N/1,000 sq. ft.) Work on facility improvements as needed (bleacher areas, paint foul poles, etc)

September:

Cleat seed the soccer field area biweekly (80% turf type tall fescue, 10 % Kentucky bluegrass, 10 % perennial ryegrass) at 2.5 lbs/1,000 sq. ft. Aerate/overseed one week instead of

only cleat seeding

Mow 2 times per week at 2-in. height of cut; double cut on game days

Cut and paint foul lines/logos weekly

October - November:

Cleat seed the soccer field area bi-weekly (80% turf type tall fescue, 10 % Kentucky bluegrass, 10 % perennial ryegrass) at 2.5 lbs/1,000 sq. ft. Aerate/overseed Cut and paint foul lines/logos weekly Edge and remove lips from infields Topdress any worn areas Plant pansies and bulbs in flower beds

