



BY MIKE TRIGG, CSFM

# PRODUCE FIELDS N



**A**s with many park districts and recreation departments, summer baseball and softball programs are very popular with the public. For this reason, it is important that your playing facilities are in proper condition. At the Waukegan Park District, we believe that proper playing conditions and maintenance of fields are extremely important. But before the first player takes the field, getting the field into a safe, playable condition may require extensive work, and the unpredictability of spring weather might not allow sufficient time.

We all have nightmare problems from the spring and summer seasons. Perhaps it's that one infield that we constantly have to cancel after a rain because of inability to remove excess water; maybe worn turf areas, or perhaps soil build-up between skinned area and turf. Plan and prepare to correct these problems in the fall.

Our goal is to prepare the ball diamond for next year's use. Just as fall is prime time for turf cultural practices, so should be field renovations. Fall renovations are scheduled at season's end to repair worn turf areas, such as the front of the pitcher's mound. Our renovation procedure includes removing the worn area to re-sod, and also reduce the skin area back to its proper dimension. We use the same procedure for removing the "lip" build-up along an arc.

Some of our fall renovation projects have been extensive using an outside contractor to improve the surface drainage of the skinned area and reduce the skinned area back to proper field dimensions. The perimeter ball mix material is pushed to the center of the field to be reused. Topsoil is brought in, leveled and graded; then the skinned infield is graded with a center crown for proper surface drainage. The renovation is completed with big roll sod. Using in-house equipment and labor to assist the contractor, we saved several hundred dollars on the cost of the renovation. Also, reducing the skin area down to proper dimension reduces daily prep time. In addition, it is great hands-on experience for staff members, who now appreciate what it takes to reno-





# BETTER EXT SPRING

vate an infield.

Fall field renovations can simply be field edging, which gives you that crisp, clean, finished look. Edging also gives you a professional look, and, more importantly, provides good ball roll and playability. Late in the fall, as turf growth is slowed, we use a sidewalk edger to trim 2-3 inches along a base line or arc edge. After removal of the turf debris, we push back and compact the ball mix to the newly established edge. We complete edging by adding additional mix to provide a level surface between the grass and skinned area.

We are also diligent with herbicide applications for weed control on skinned areas. Backpack applications of Roundup herbicide, with a color dye indicator, control miscellaneous weeds that appear on skinned areas, fence lines, and warning tracks. This is particularly beneficial to ball diamonds that go out of play in August, with no scheduled use until the following spring.

Don't wait to communicate your field renovation project ideas. Prepare months in advance and communicate your intentions and expectations to coaches, athletic directors, and park and recreation staff. Develop a checklist of items with projected start and completion dates of field renovations or improvements you want to undertake. Communicate what the results will be when given the chance to do these fall field renovation projects.

In Waukegan, we conduct regular sports field inspections in order to prevent accidents. The inspections identify hazards that can be corrected before causing injuries to patrons or employees.

No matter what level of sports turf maintenance, the aim is to identify and correct hazardous conditions that may exist on your facilities. The goal is to reduce frequency and possible severity of player injury and unnecessary accidents through proper field inspection and maintenance.

On a playing field there are many hazardous conditions that can be easily identified because they are visible and obvious. However, there can be problem areas that are not so obvious, and often only detected

through an inspection process.

The following are items in our sports field inspection checklist that we conduct annually:

#### Maintenance of Skinned Area

- \* Inspection of infield composition.
- \* Leveling of worn area near bases/rubbers.
- \* Correct build-up between turf and skinned area.

#### Selection and Anchoring of Bases

- \* Base anchors correctly installed.
- \* Inspecting pitcher rubbers and home plates.

#### Maintenance of Fencing and Backstops

- \* Exposed concrete footings.
- \* Chain link fence properly secured.

#### Additional Safety Considerations

- \* Bleacher/player benches inspection and maintenance.
- \* Athletic field lighting inspection and maintenance.

Take the time to review those items on your sports field inspection checklist that can possibly be addressed this fall. Most importantly, document any repairs or work completed relating to safety hazards. Specifically, document all work done, when, and by whom, the problem identified, and actions taken to rectify or repair.

Take advantage of the fall months to prepare your fields for spring use. Coaches and players will want to begin practices as soon as spring weather permits. Next spring your efforts will be appreciated by many who will have fun, and will play safely because of the prior planning and prudent preparation you undertook in the fall.

**ST**

Mike Trigg, CSFM, from the Waukegan Park District, Waukegan, IL, is President-Elect of the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA).



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