

# Olympic baseball field "made in USA"

**T**he world's eyes were on Greece for the 2004 Summer Games, where the best athletes came to prove themselves worthy of gold. Sports Turf Managers Association past president Murray Cook led The Brickman Group's design and management services on the Helleniko Baseball Centre in Athens. "These were the best playing surfaces the sport has had since becoming an Olympic sport," said Aldo Notari, president of the International Baseball Federation.

Brickman's SportsTurf services has seen its share of "Olympic Gold," having worked in a similar capacity on the stadiums for the 2000 games in Sydney, Australia and the 2002 Baseball World Cup in Taiwan, while looking ahead to the 2008 games in Beijing, China.

"Aside from the rough terrain, one of the major challenges with the Athens project was working with a crew of native talent who had never seen a baseball game," said Cook. A Deputy Competition Manager with the Athens Olympic Committee, Cook was probably the best authority to teach the crews what they needed to know to build and maintain the fields. "We had to explain to volunteers

many things we take for granted: what is a drag, what is a rake, what is a tamp, and what is a base, even."

Converting the site was the other challenge. It was no small feat to take an abandoned World War II airfield and turn it into a world class playing surface. "This field had seen two World Wars," says Cook. "When we began excavating, we discovered ordnance deep under the runways. Every time we turned over another piece of tarmac we'd have to call in the army to check everything out."

Cook says they unearthed six bombs, both German and British, in the first phase of construction.

Once the Games opened, Cook's job was far from over. He and his team were on site to supervise the competition schedule and ensure the field and maintenance operations ran smoothly.

"In all my 20+ years of playing international sports, I would rank this facility and playing surface at the top of the list," said Dusty Rhodes, manager of the Greek National team. **ST**

*The Brickman Group, Ltd., supplied this story and photos. For more information visit [www.brickmangroup.com](http://www.brickmangroup.com).*



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