ORAN GOOD 5 IS MORE

BY **SUZ TRUSTY**

Designated simply as Oran Good 5, the fifth field of the Oran Good softball complex is a softball field truly worthy of the Sports Turf Managers Association 2003 Softball Field of the Year honors in the High School/Parks and Recreation division. Oran Good 5 is the championship level softball field of the City of Farmers Branch, located at the northwest corner of the Dallas Metroplex in north central Texas.

The growing City of Farmers Branch has a population of approximately 27,000, which nearly triples during the business day. The city's governmental entities and its residents want and expect the entire park system, including the athletic fields, to be maintained to very high standards. A strong tax base and a supportive City Council provide the funding necessary to do so. In addition, the Parks and Recreation Department has developed a highly interactive program of coordination with the city's local hotels and motels to generate room use for tournaments. This provides a positive impact on the city's economy thus further aiding the athletic program.

F. Jeff Fuller, Director of the Parks and Recreation Department, says, "Oran Good 5 is just one example of our concentration on excellence. Our entire system operates on the standard that mediocrity is intolerable, which puts us on track for continuous improvement. The softball complex was improved through the implementation of the 1985 Oran Good Athletic Field Improvements bond program. The original site was little more than four red clay softball fields in a pie configuration and one additional remote field, all with few amenities for the field patrons. A concession stand on wheels and a makeshift portable restroom facility located within an area of worn, abused, and uneven turf invited guests to 'enjoy their experience' as they entered the complex.

"The major field construction started in 1985 and wrapped up in 1986. Contractors were responsible for the majority of the initial construction including field layout and grade work, installation of utilities and infrastructure, as well as the overhead metal halide lights surrounding the perimeter of the field, permanent seating behind the backstop and a high tech electronic model scoreboard in the outfield," says Fuller.

"City staff was responsible for installing a state of the art irrigation system consisting of rotor heads in the outfield and high-speed rotor heads around the perimeter of the clay infields with a state of the art controller completing the system. In addition, in-house staff built and installed the dugouts, backstops, and perimeter fencing complete with cantilevered gates to provide easy access for maintenance equipment and a 150 foot by 150 foot field tarp."

Beginning in 1990, with the construction and completion of the concession stand and storage for the team, a restroom facility, stadium styled seating and parking lots, Oran Good 5 began to take the shape as it appears today.

Fuller adds, "In 2001, the dugout tops and backs were installed by City staff, and a new shade structure was installed by the material supplier. These are covered with a royal blue fabric to reduce heat and sun exposure and to provide additional safety measures for the players in the dugouts and the patrons throughout the concession, restroom, and adjacent spectators areas. The outfield fence fabric also is covered with a royal blue windscreen and topped with a bright yellow fence cap installed to visibly warn players when they are approaching the barrier.

"The current softball field is designed to accommodate Women's College softball tournaments with its 200-foot outfield fence. It is the complex's Championship field and the shared home of the Carrollton/Farmers Branch Girls' Softball League as well as the R. L. Turner High School's Lady Lions. As such, this field is part of a cooperative agreement between the city of Carrollton, the local school district, and the City of Farmers Branch to best use the limited areas and resources of all entities. The two cities began their alliance in the early 1980s, deciding to set up the joint league and work together. Over the past 10-15 years girls' softball just exploded with more than100 teams now involved in the League. The school district added a girls softball and soccer program about 10 years ago and became part of the cooperative agreement, using the existing facilities rather than developing a softball or soccer complex of their own. This is a fiscally sound move for all

THAN GOOD– IT'S GREAT!

involved as well as giving the high school varsity and junior varsity teams a premium facility on which to develop their skills," Fuller says.

Despite the financial requirements necessary to provide the equipment, materials, labor, and associated maintenance of the field, Oran Good 5 is provided free of charge for local league and tournament games.

Play is extensive. The softball complex is used 10 months of the year, with at least nine major tournaments occurring during that period. Activity begins at the end of January, with the start of the girls high school program. Both the varsity and junior varsity teams use the field for practices and games. Typically practices will run from 3 PM to around 6 PM each afternoon games are not scheduled. On the 2-3 game days each week, the JV takes the field around 4:30 PM with the varsity games beginning around 6 PM. This schedule runs until the end of April culminating with the tournament of champions statewide high school softball tournament. In May, college-level state and national tournaments come to Oran Good 5, including the NAIA regional and sectional games. This involves teams from Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. During these series, about 10-12 games are played on the field. League play also begins in May and runs to the end of July, with a major tournament, involving 50-75 teams, taking place each month.

During the Texas summers, when temperatures spike to over 100 degrees and drying winds are a daily occurrence, there's a lull in play lasting throughout August until early September. Then the Girls' Softball League play starts up again, with practices and games running into December. Fall also brings the opening ceremonies and softball games of the Special Olympics Fall Games. In 2003, the Carrollton/Farmers Branch Girls' Softball League's Santa Softball Tournament, serving the Metrocrest Social Service Center, brought 50 teams to the complex on December 5. The locally based Metrocrest serves the needy of four major cities: Addison, Coppell, Carrollton, and Farmers Branch. This annual fund-raising tournament has the backing of the league, and the support of and appearances by the Mayor and City Council. It traditionally brings from 500-700 toys and about $500 in cash, plus stacks of canned goods, for distribution by the Metrocrest Social Service Center.

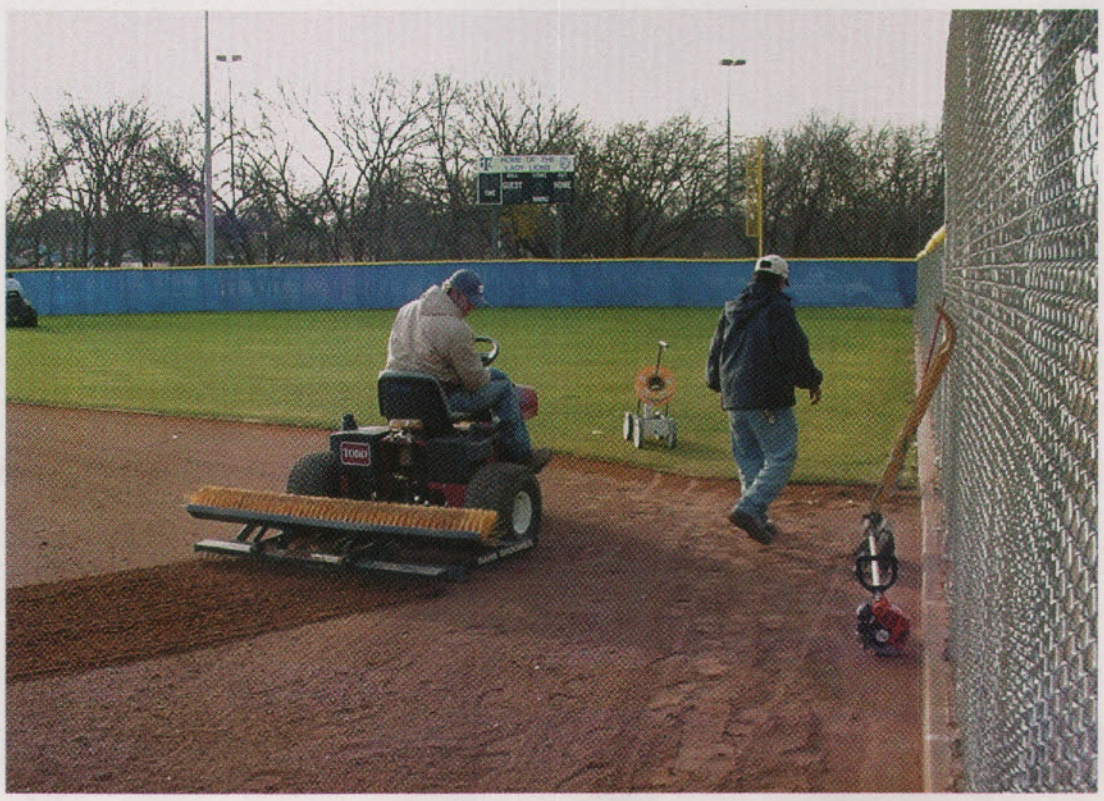
Robin Edwards, Park Maintenance Supervisor, says, "The Oran Good 5 field is maintained by a staff of four full-time athletic field specialists, including Russell Coe, Athletic Field Specialist II, and one tractor operator. This crew also is responsible for the 4 additional softball fields, 5 baseball fields, 9 soccer fields, 1 football field and are partially responsible for 2 practice facilities consisting of 23 acres of various softball, baseball, soccer and football fields.

"All of the fields have schedules similar to Oran Good 5. We often have every baseball and soccer field in use as well as all of the fields of the softball complex. The athletic field crew will go to all of our sites every day. They've done extensive cross training, so all can handle any part of the field maintenance and game preparation. There also is excellent cooperation and communication between our people which gives Russell the option to call in personnel from any of the other five crews to assist with specific tasks or pull tarp on or off when it rains," says Edwards.

Obviously, an extensive and well-designed maintenance program is essential to support all the on-field activity. The outfield soil profile is the native heavy, black gumbo clay. Surface drainage is achieved by a one- percent grade. The outfield turf is common bermudagrass and is mowed at 15/16 of an inch three times per week using a 5-gang reel mower pulled behind a tractor. Finish mowing and trimming is performed with a rotary mower and a variety of hand held power tools.

With the only downtime occurring during the height of summer heat, there's little

THE CREW IS RESPONSIBLE FOR 20 FIELDS AS WELL AS WORKING ON TWO PRACTICE FACILITIES THAT TOTAL MORE THAN 23 ACRES OF FIELDS



opportunity for extensive turf renovation. The field use schedule also prohibits core aerification. Coe says, "We compensate with an aggressive program of aerifying every 2 weeks with a slicing aerator. Mowing as close and as frequently as we do with the reel mower coupled with the frequent slicing helps us to keep a good strong lateral growth in the Bermuda.

"We also overseed the field in late September with perennial ryegrass for good turf cover for early and late season play. This year, we've adjusted the overseeding rate up to 15 pounds per 1,000 square feet, rather than the 4 pounds per thousand we've used in the past, attempting to get a good stand of rye, but somewhat weaker plants. We're anticipating that will give us a smoother transition back to Bermuda. At the lower rate, we've had times when cool springs and early summers spurred the rye and it didn't transition out until the weather hit 100 degrees or so.

"Additional routine maintenance includes fertilizing once per month during the bermudagrass active growing season with 46-0-0 slow-release nitrogen at the rate of 1 pound of Nitrogen (N) per 1,000 square feet," says Coe. "We adjust the rate from October through March to .25 pound of N every two weeks to maintain the perennial ryegrass. The first spring application and the final application in the fall are complete fertilizers applied to encourage disease resistance and nutrient uptake and storage. Soil testing and tissue testing are conducted at least once each year and the results analyzed in order to make any necessary adjustments in our fertilization program. The fields are relatively weed-free due to strong turf conditions. This is maintained through diligent inspection and infrequent use of various postemergence herbicides for spot treatment following standard IPM practices.

The fields and adjacent areas are baited in spring and fall to eliminate any fire ant problems. Timing of these applications depends on weather conditions. Cool tempera-

Inspections

Fields: Daily, year round
Irrigation: Monthly, November through February; weekly, March through October
Bleachers: Weekly, year round
Lighting: Weekly, year round
Cut lines: Monthly, November through March; weekly, April through October
Litter: Daily, year round
Restrooms: Daily, year round

Maintenance Program

January - March:
Mow two times per week at 1 to 1.5 inch height
Irrigate as needed
Fertilize with 46-0-0 at the rate of .25 pound of N per 1,000 square feet every two weeks

April:
Mow three times per week at 15/16-inch height
Irrigate 3 to 5 times per week, depending on conditions
Fertilize with 24-8-16 at the rate of 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet
Slice aerify every two weeks

May:
Mow three times per week at 15/16-inch height
Irrigate 3 to 5 times per week, depending on conditions
Fertilize with 46-0-0 at the rate of 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet
Slice aerify every two weeks
Topdress with # 9 sand
Monitor for weeds and apply spot control if needed for nutgrass, grassy or broadleaf weeds
Bait for fire ants (timing varies depending on weather conditions)

June:
Mow three times per week at 15/16-inch height
Irrigate 3 to 5 times per week, depending on conditions
Fertilize with 46-0-0 at the rate of 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet
Slice aerify every two weeks
Monitor for weeds and apply spot control if needed for nutgrass, grassy or broadleaf weeds

July:
Mow three times per week at 15/16-inch height
Irrigate 3 to 5 times per week, depending on conditions
Fertilize with 46-0-0 at the rate of 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet
Slice aerify every two weeks
Monitor for weeds and apply spot control if needed for nutgrass, grassy or broadleaf weeds

August:
Mow three times per week at 15/16-inch height
Irrigate 3 to 5 times per week, depending on conditions
Fertilize with 46-0-0 at the rate of 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet
Slice aerify every two weeks
Topdress with # 9 sand
Monitor for weeds and apply spot control if needed for nutgrass, grassy or broadleaf weeds
Resod any bare areas in outfield

September:
Mow three times per week at 15/16-inch height
Irrigate 3 to 5 times per week, depending on conditions
Fertilize with 24-8-6 at the rate of 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet
Slice aerify every two weeks
Overseed with 10 to 15 pounds of perennial ryegrass per 1,000 square feet
Topdress
Bait for fire ants (timing varies depending on weather conditions)

October - December:
Mow two times per week at 1 to 1.5 inch height
Irrigate as needed
Fertilize with 46-0-0 at the rate of .25 pound of N per 1,000 square feet every two weeks

tures or extreme heat suppress the ant population. A mound may still appear occasionally after a rain, but the impact is minimal. Approximately 50 City personnel monitor for fire ant activity and act to prevent unacceptable levels on all park properties throughout the city. There have been no other insect infestations.

The transition area between the infield and outfield at the arc is washed weekly or bi-weekly depending on staff availability to reduce and/or eliminate lip buildup and increase safety on the field. Other techniques are used in the off-season when necessary.

Coe says, "The infield clay area was rebuilt during the winter of 2001-2002 by in-house staff and is a mixture of approximately 20 percent sand, 60 percent clay and 20 percent calcined clay. It has been modified with additional calcined clay as wet conditions warrant. We drag the field with a field rake and pull-behind groomer.

"Irrigation is a critical factor. We typically water the infield clay at night, as well as the turf. We inspect the moisture in the skinned area the first thing each morning to see how much it has been affected by the wind and if any additional irrigation is needed. We'll do a nail drag, then tackle the other areas of maintenance, the mowing, usually in two directions, trimming, cleaning of the restrooms. The primary concern is to get the correct amount of moisture so the infield plays as it should," says Coe. "We'll put a final groom on it later in the day. The extra work is well worth it. The tournament teams know that extra attention to the infield gives us good playing conditions in wet or dry weather, even when other area fields aren't playable."

The athletic field staff doesn't see that as anything out of the ordinary. They expect to go the extra mile. Edwards says, "When I told one of the crew members about the Award and how proud of them we were, he noted he was just doing his job. That reflects the tremendous attitude of our entire staff."

Coe recently earned his Certified Professional Turfgrass Manager certification through the Texas Turfgrass Association, further evidence of the level of professionalism expected and achieved. Fuller adds, "Oran Good 5 has received extensive praise from nationally recognized softball teams ranging from the Under 8 Divisions through College level teams due to the exceptional quality of the field and professional customer service. Teams from all over the Dallas Metroplex comment on the tremendous quality of the facilities and turf. The city of Farmers Branch prides itself on being service oriented and responsive to our citizens' needs. Oran Good 5 is a prime example of what dedicated employees, positive administrative encouragement, interagency cooperation and a supportive community can accomplish when they work together." **ST**

Suz Trusty is communications director of the Sports Turf Managers Association.