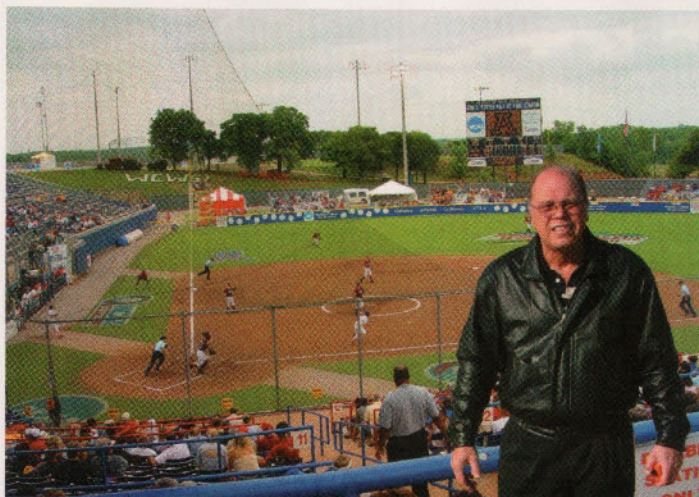


USA SOFTBALL FACILITY IN GOOD HANDS

SPORTSTURF recently talked with Johnny McClung, long-time turf manager for the USA Softball facilities in Oklahoma City, OK:

ST: Describe your duties and the facilities at USA Softball.

McClung: I am responsible for the maintenance and overall operation of the physical plant. This consists of the Amateur Softball Association National Office and grounds and the Don E. Porter ASA Hall of Fame Stadium four-field complex. We maintain the four fields during the season and during the off-season for upgrades on a consistent basis, plus we have a staff that must have ongoing training including safety programs.



ST: Tell us how you prepare your infields for Olympic-level softball games.

McClung: I guess you could say we're in the spotlight. With the NCAA College World Series televised on ESPN, we have to be ready for this and other prestigious events. The playing surface has to be near perfect. We have to be prepared for any problems and of course the weather can threaten at any time in Oklahoma. The demands are high and we strive to meet every challenge as best we can.

ST: What's the most frustrating part of your job?

McClung: Tournament directors, coaches, umpires, and others can be very demanding at times and, on occasion, a little unreasonable. With so many different personalities, you really have to love your

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job and be as flexible as possible. The one thing you can't control is the weather and of course it gets very tense during rain delays. Being prepared for the worst is the best you can do. With as many games as we play per day, softball damage does occur and the quality of the fields is very difficult to maintain. As always, safety is a top priority with our staff.

ST: What would you recommend, generally, to someone facing the task of building or rebuilding a softball field?

McClung: Usage, budget restraints, and the level of play are three important factors that always should be considered. Grass is grown by the inch and killed by the foot with a cleated shoe on it. Lawsuits can rob a sports program and unnecessary injuries can cost someone their career. A well-maintained park is a safer park. Regular inspections can identify hazards so they can be eliminated.

ST: What have been the high point and low point of your career in field management?

McClung: The high point is to realize the fruits of your labor. This is evident when ESPN televises the Women's College World Series and our work is shown nationwide. Of course this results in many positive comments, not only from people attending the event but also from people throughout the United States. We maintain our fields for youth tournaments almost the same way we prepare them for prestigious events. To our staff, there is no difference. We strive for excellence. A benefit is to see the little kids' eyes when they see the stadium for the first time—all the work is worth it.

The low point is when teams that travel long distances and aren't able to play because of rain. There is nothing you can do. It's disappointing because our staff goes all out to ensure that everyone can play ball at our facility. It's the best in the United States and we all are very proud of it. **ST**

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