

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY EARNS SOFTBALL FIELD OF THE YEAR HONORS

BY SUZ TRUSTY

Alberta B. Farrington Softball Stadium of Arizona State University earned the Sports Turf Managers Association 2003 Softball Field of the Year honors in the College/University division.

Arizona State University unveiled the state-of-the-art Alberta B. Farrington Softball Stadium April 8, 2000. It is the latest of the sports facilities of ASU Athletics. It features chair-back bleachers and individual seats with a capacity for 1,535 fans. A grass berm to accommodate additional fans is located just beyond the first base line.

Farrington Stadium has several amenities that make it one of the premier softball stadiums in the country. Sunken dugouts are lighted for night games. Each dugout has recessed, individual bat slots and locker room access. In addition, there are coaches' offices, a fully equipped training room, built-in concession stands, team shop, restrooms, and locker rooms for the home team, visiting team, and officials.

Before the 2003 season, one batting cage was relocated from the home side to

the visitor's side of the field. The visitor's bullpen also was relocated just past the berm. Six hitting stations were added on the home side where the batting cage once stood.

Facility Manager Pete Wozniak says, "The original softball field was started in the 1980s. Farrington Stadium was built around the existing field. We've amended the original native soil field through aeration and topdressing with sand. The outfield turf is Santa Anna common Bermudagrass overseeded with Chaparral perennial ryegrass in November. The winter and spring seasons are played on the perennial ryegrass. The ryegrass burns out naturally over the summer, leaving the Bermudagrass base for the fall workouts and practices.

"The skinned area consists of native caliche clay soil amended over time with Stabilizer red infield mix, sand, and calcined clay. It's now about 30 percent clay. The infield is topped with vitrified clay and infield mix. Since the team usually plays in shorts, using infield mix creates a good, safe sliding surface. The mound and plate areas consist of Hilltopper Compound. The 10-foot warning track is topped with a 2 to 3-inch layer of Stabilizer 1/4 inch minus mix, also the red. We've amended the lead off areas at all three bases, adding stability. This past

March, we mixed in 200 pounds of Stabilizer and added Hilltopper clay where the position players play.

"The field is irrigated with oscillating sprinklers. There are five in the center turf areas and the rest line the perimeter. To help manage irrigation, a full-circle, oscillating sprinkler is mounted on a quick coupler 7 feet behind the pitching rubber. Six additional quick couplers surround the grass area."

Events

The facility is used primarily for ASU's Softball team practices and games from January through May. Conditioning begins on September first. The team members do the conditioning workouts on their own. Though these workouts are not required, they are expected of any serious players, so essentially the workouts mark the beginning of fall field use. Conditioning is followed by 4-5 weeks of team practices, running through December. The fall season usually includes five games.

The spring season consists of approximately 50 games, including two national tournaments. Wozniak says, "From January to March of 2004 the team played 41 games, before they even traveled. In 2003, with the



Fiesta Bowl Tournament and the Louisville Slugger Tournament in February, 53 games were held between January 22 and May 9. These are mostly night games, beginning at 7:00 PM. Sunday games begin at 1:00 PM. Tournaments, such as those during the Pac-10 season in March and April, might start at 10 in the morning and play five games. For the Louisville Slugger Tournament, we had games scheduled at 9, 11, 2, 4, and 6 on Friday and Saturday and at 8, 10 and 12 on Sunday. At least one crewmember is on hand through all the games and more are there if we expect rain.

"In addition, Farrington Stadium hosted the Greek National team for practices in January and June of 2003. In July, the Women's Professional Fast Pitch League had a clinic and game at the stadium. In June, the ASU Football team hosted two weekends of passing league games for high school juniors, complete with a 40-yard field layout and an endzone on the softball field. Triple Crown Sports had softball games involving the 8-9 year old level through the teens played five games a day for two days in June. We installed pitching rubbers at 43 and 40 and 35 feet for that event. This event includes an opening ceremony similar to the Olympics parade of participants, but that is limited to the warning track on the infield. The State High School Championships also took place at Farrington Stadium. This involves both the 4A and 5A schools each year, and can put an additional 2 to 4 games on the field. The site is selected depending on the location of the competing teams. In the summer of 2004, the field may potentially host the Arizona Senior Olympics as well as the Arizona Special Olympics."

Crew responsibilities

As well as Farrington Softball Stadium, Wozniak's crew is responsible for Sun Devil Stadium, Packard Baseball Stadium, Sun Angel Track Stadium, two football practice fields, and an Astroturf soccer field. All are used for practices and games. There are extra events on the other facilities as well. For example, the Turf Challenge Fund Raiser in late April, which turns the football practice fields into 24 grass volleyball courts, creates a lot of excitement and makes some money for the team.

The staff consists of five full-time employees, including Wozniak, and up to four part time students. On the full-time staff, Brian Johnson is Grounds Manager, and Greg Godinez and Jerry Campbell are Groundskeepers. Wozniak is in the

process of filling the Facility Supervisor position, formerly held by Mike Reno and vacated when Reno went back to college. On the student side, the three regulars are Ryan Leavit, Kevin Denney, and Josh Ladd, with Shaun Scott filling in as needed.

Wozniak says, "There are usually no more than four people on site at one time, unless we are pulling the rain tarp. Once practice begins, if there are games

An impressive ballpark needs an impressive field, and I got that with Bull's-Eye. Here we are in April, and the grass is growing like it's July. I'm very happy with what I have seen so far.

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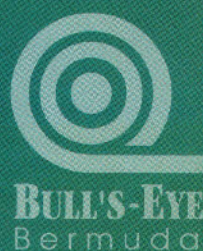
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Director of Field & Landscape Maintenance
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on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, the teams are off on Monday and so are our students. We will pull everyone in if the teams are on the road and we're using that window for maintenance. The students generally start at 9:00 AM because of class schedules, with three working Wednesday and Friday and two on Tuesday and Thursday. The fields are usually ready for practice by the time they head for class around noon.

"We're also responsible for the stadiums themselves and coordinate all of the stadium maintenance. If it's minor, we do it: changing light bulbs inside and outside, cleaning the pads around the fields, fixing seats. For major electrical or plumbing issues we use the campus facility management. We have a contractor for cleaning. A landscaping service trims all the palm trees on campus once a year."

Wozniak started working at ASU in the summer of 1986 when he transferred there as a student in the marketing program. After he earned his degree in marketing in 1989, he moved to a full-time field position. He says, "Around 1990 or 91, Alan Sigwardt, formerly in the head position here and now with Pro Player Stadium, put in a mentoring session with me on the softball and baseball fields. That really sharpened my focus on field quality. The past 9 years, I've been fortunate to work on the Super Bowl with Ed Mangan and George Toma and the great crew they assemble for that event. It's a super networking and learning session and I've come back with something new to implement on our fields each year.

"My crew here is one of the best around. They have the dedication and com-



mitment to produce the best possible field conditions and will step in and do whatever is needed to get the job done." There's no exaggeration in that statement. This is the crew that pulled off the nearly instant Monday Night Football game at Sun Devil Stadium last season when California fires forced the game to be moved from Qualcomm Stadium.

Arizona weather

The extreme hot weather in Arizona creates many challenges. Wozniak says, "Even with all the calcined clay tilled into the skinned area to help hold moisture in, on a typical game day, the skin may be watered 3-4 hours to keep everything playable. Using the infield sprinklers to facilitate this saves greatly on labor power. On a still day, we can cover the majority of the surface with the sprinklers. On a windy day, we may water the whole field with the hose. Either way we'll put on a half inch of water or more. Even in April, early morning temperatures could be in the low 70s, with humidity levels around 26 percent and the dew point at 36. By noon, temperatures could hit the mid 80s, with the same humidity levels, and the winds could pick up. So it's critical to soak the infield early in the day, and keep soaking it to hit the right moisture for play.

"One day during the first week of April we had an inch of rain and didn't have the field tarped. Temperatures were in the low 70s, there was no sun, and by 7:00 PM we could have played on the infield.

"Temperatures are over 100 degree F for much of the summer, with many days



Maintenance Program for Alberta B. Farrington Stadium

January

Mow 6 times per week at 5/8 inch
Fertilize with 22-3-9 at rate of 1 pound N per thousand square feet
Edge field
Fertilize with 5-5-20 with .42% Barricade at rate of 1 pound N per thousand square feet
Roll infield after games

February

Mow 6 times per week at 5/8 inch
Fertilize with 22-3-9 at rate of 1 pound N per thousand square feet
Edge field
Seed with perennial ryegrass at outfield positions after tournaments
Roll infield after games

March

Mow 6 times per week at 5/8 inch
Fertilize with 22-3-9 at rate of 1 pound N per thousand square feet
Edge field
Hose edges
Roll infield after games

April

Mow 6 times per week at 5/8 inch
Edge field twice

May

Mow 6 times per week at 5/8 inch
Fertilize with 21-0-0 at rate of 1 pound N per thousand square feet
Edge field
Hose edges

June

Mow 3 times per week at 1/2 inch
Deep tine core aerify and remove cores
Topdress with 25 tons of sand
Edge prior to scheduled events
Fertilize with 21-0-0 at rate of 1 pound N per thousand square feet

July

Mow 3 times per week at 1/2 inch
Edge prior to scheduled events
Apply ant control if needed following regular IPM procedures

August

Mow 3 times per week at 1/2 inch
Fertilize twice with 21-0-0 at rate of 1.25 pound N per thousand square feet
Fertilize with 5-5-20 with .42% Barricade at rate of 1 pound N per thousand square feet

September

Mow 3 times per week at 1/2 inch
Edge before first practice

October

Mow 3 times per week at 1/2 inch
Hose edges
Start thinning Bermudagrass for overseeding

November

Hose edges
Solid tine aerate
Scalp and overseed with 450 pounds of Chaparral Perennial ryegrass
Lightly topdress with sand
Fertilize with 6-20-20 at rate of 1 pound (P) per thousand square feet
Fertilize with 22-4-10 at rate of 1 pound N per thousand square feet
Mow 2 times per week at 5/8 inch

December

Mow 3 times per week at 5/8 inch
Fertilize with 22-3-9 at rate of 1 pound N per thousand square feet

in the 110 to 115 degree range. So, when the season ends in June, we'll pull the bases and put them away but leave the plate and the rubber. We'll clay everything, level the field out, drag it and water it, and basically put it to bed until the August start up for the fall season, unless we need it for an event. We'll keep just enough water on the outfield to keep the grass going."

Average annual rainfall is 7 inches a year. Except for a few good springtime storms, most rains are around a tenth of an inch. A quarter to one half inch is heavy rain. But, during the 2003 season, the greatest challenge was rain. "In March, 4 inches of rain fell, over half of our annual average. Our custom cut tarp did a great job for us," says Wozniak. "Because any soft spots could become slick, we keep the infield as firm as possible. You could actually walk through a standing water puddle and not leave a footprint. So even with the heavy rains, the infield would be playable soon after the rain stopped. The only rainouts came from too much moisture in the turf area."

On a typical practice day, the crew pulls and plugs the bases, and repacks whatever clay is necessary in the pitcher's area, batters boxes and catchers area. The back edge is swept to keep dirt off. The skinned area is then dragged using a 6 x 6-foot drag screen pulled by a field rake. All excess material is scooped up and discarded. The field is then watered with the sprinkler while the other areas the sprinkler doesn't cover are watered with a 1-inch hose. The dugouts are swept. The warning track is hand dragged with a 6 x 3-foot mat and watered if necessary. The bullpens and batting cages are raked and packed, and watered if needed. The infield is watered again, bases installed, and the infield foul lines are chalked. Wozniak meets with the coaching staff and practice begins.

For games, the same process is followed. In addition, complete game lines are chalked and foul lines are painted in the grass using a 3-inch paintbrush. A stencil will be used to paint a logo in the dirt behind home plate. The warning track is dragged by hand and watered using a 50-foot hose and the five quick couplers spaced along the track. After infields, the crew sets freshly painted bases, puts down the batters box and rakes out the spots used. They paint the pitching rubber and home plate and hang up the banners around the stands.

Wozniak says, "Our goal is to have the safety and playability of the field the same for all practices and games. If there are multiple games (double, or triple headers or more), the field rake is used for a quick drag between games while the pitchers area and plate area are raked and packed. This is usually complete in

about 5 minutes. If there is more time, we will run the sprinkler until the umpires stop us. Immediately following all games, the infield and practice/warm-up areas are completely prepared for the following day."

Right field has been a persistent problem after it was used as a load in area for construction of the Stadium. Flatbed trucks, forklifts and cranes all did significant damage to the area. Construction was still in process when the team started practice that year, so once the stands and dugouts were built, the crew moved home plate out 8 feet and shifted everything else to accommodate it. That March, they tilled the whole field and removed 12 loads of rocks, nails and other debris left by the construction. Even now, tilling by the dugout areas and stadium will turn up a bit of hidden debris.

Wozniak says, "We've used aggressive aeration to relieve the compaction in right field, and have slowly redeveloped good conditions for growing grass. Our only weed problems have been *Poa Annua* in the cooler months and purple nutsedge in the area where we moved in the outfield fence from 225 feet to 190 and 210. We've pretty well eliminated both of these. This past March, we aerated wear areas and overseeded in the outfield positions and those spots where we'd taken out the last of the *Poa*. That little extra attention brought the turf back into top shape after those 41 early games."

In order to keep the field at its best, Wozniak stresses close communication with the coaches and players. He gets the schedule at the start of the season so maintenance procedures can be fit into the travel, practice and game slots. He'll check in with the softball coach regularly to confer on the teams' preferred infield moisture levels and to update her on procedures, even such little things as rerolling the field, since it could affect ball speed during practice. They'll work together to coordinate the fall overseeding program so practices can move off the turf to allow the transition with as little disruption as possible for the team.

Wozniak says, "My crew and I are dedicated to providing the best possible playing conditions for the Alberta B. Farrington Stadium softball field and for all the athletic fields at ASU. We greatly appreciate the support of the coaches, the players, the athletic department and their recognition of our part in the overall ASU athletic program." **ST**

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